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# Usurped

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# Prologue

"I will also give thee for a light to the gentiles, that thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth." -- Isaiah X:LIX6

Indeed, through their very long sojourn, the Israelites and as they were later called, the Diaspora Jews, remained the light unto the gentiles, faithful to their one and only God in spite of being routed and banished from country to country and from place to place. Murdered, persecuted, robbed of everything they possessed, hounded, forced or bribed to abandon their religion and become converts to other beliefs, they were denied the God given right to live as human beings and work as others did. All this was done to them in the name of Jesus, the Savior, the very one who preached brotherly love and who was himself a Jew.

The 2000 year sojourn for the Jews began as the second Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. The Jews were taken into bondage and scattered among the nations of the world. In Babylon they sat at the waters and wept and wept and vowed "If I forget thee O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its cunning". This motto they passed on from generation to generation. The pious Jew has through these thousands of years until today, turned east in his prayers to face Jerusalem. Nations came and went in these millennia, but the Jews remained, never relinquishing the hope that the day will come when they shall return to their land and rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem.

The love affair between the Jews and their God, as well as the obstinancy and deep abiding faith with which the Jews rallied in the face of adversity, was matched by the cruelty and determination to eradicate them by Crusaders, Popes, Kings, Emperors, Churchmen, and fanatics from all walks of life.

The Jews of the Diaspora did not escape being affected by the civilization of their adopted lands. Many of their characteristics as well as the Yiddish language is a derivative of the Diaspora. Wherever the Jews resided, they enriched the economic, cultural, and scientific milieu. Jewish achievements in these areas far outnumber those of any other minority; this fact is well documented.

Yet, in spite of it all (and perhaps because of it), the Jews were despised. The persecutions continued. Massacres, conflagrations, dispossessions, pogroms were common occurrences. But, nothing, absolutely nothing, could match the ingenuity of twentieth century Third Reich Germany at whose helm stood Adolf Hitler. Germany, the highly civilized nation which produced Schiller, Heine, Mozart,

Bach, Strauss, and many other cultural giants; that nation took it upon herself to outdo two thousand years of cruelty with unmatched ingenuity. To top it all, among the initiators could be found a preponderance of those people who belonged to the upper echelon of that society, many of whom were high ranking medical doctors.

Who can forget that fateful day of January 30, 1933, when the President of the German Republic, Paul von Hindenberg, administered the oath of office to Adolf Hitler as the Chancellor of that country, and thus, a great upheaval of human rights followed. The gates of inhumanity had been opened, and Europe was enveloped in "darkness". The new Chancellor became the devil incarnate, spouting his incantations and unleashing a force of evil beyond anyone's wildest imagination. Hitler was not squeamish; he smashed anyone and everything in his way. From the start of his reign, he vowed openly to destroy the Jews of the world, so great was his hatred. To begin with, he made life unbearable for the Jewish population by declaring them subhuman and therefore an undesirable element. Hitler's continued diatribe against the Jews won him many sympathetic ears and soon a preponderance of the German people tacitly acquiesced; in the Fall of 1935 the Nuremberg Laws were passed, and with the promulgation of these laws, practically all civil rights of the German Jewish populace were withdrawn. Physicians, dentists, judges, lawyers -- in short, all who held professional posts and were 'non-Aryans", were denied permission to practice their professions. Suddenly, many openings were created in the job market, and these were eagerly filled by Aryan counterparts. It appeared therefore that wanton discrimination was justifiable.

Hitler lived and dreamed for expansion. He purported to need "Lebensraum", lots of space. He maintained that Germany was entitled to more land, and that he was willing and able to use force if needed, to obtain it. The world did not seem to take him seriously, even when Hitler, himself Austrian, dreamed about the "Anschluss" of Austria into the German Reich, thus expanding the Reich while at the same time nullifying Austria as a country. At a later time, he maintained that Austria and Sudetenland were the "lost territories". In contrast, he referred to Czechoslovakia and to Russia as the "new territories". He lay in wait until the opportune moment came in 1938 when he achieved a bloodless takeover of Austria. The rest of the world reacted with acquiescence and justified this act as the right of all German speaking people to be one nation. But Hitler's vision of grandure and his enormous appetite could hardly be appeased. Encouraged by the non-interference of other nations and seeing how successfully and with what ease he achieved his goal, that same year he dispatched an ultimatum to Czechoslovakia, ordering her to surrender her strategic defenses, knowing full well that Czechoslovakia

had made a pact with France and England to protect her in case of war. But French Premier Daladier and British Prime Minister Chamberlain repudiated their promises and sacrificed the country. Czechoslovakia was obliged to capitulate in order to slake Hitler's appetite.

Presently, Hitler embarked on a bold action of piracy. On September 1, 1939, he attacked the neighboring country of Poland which he occupied within the month, and like so many times before, by a prearranged plan, it was partitioned between Germany and Soviet Russia. Similarly, several months later, German troops took Denmark and Norway, then the Netherlands and Belgium. In June of 1940, France fell. In March of 1941, he entered Yugoslavia, in May Greece, and later in 1941 he attacked Russia. After that, some European countries became part of the Fascist Axis; the road was paved for further action.

Hitler appointed SS Reichsfuhrer Himmler to take charge of the final solution to the Jewish Question. The Fuhrer himself gave orders to start the "Euthanasia Program". By then, many concentration camps had already been built and many more were in the process of being erected: Majdanek, Treblinka, Belzec, Chelmno, Sobibor, Auschwitz. Gas chambers and crematoria were built to facilitate the mass annihilation of undesirable elements. Experiments were carried out to ascertain which of the gases to utilize. At first, carbon monoxide was used, but it proved very tedious. Eventually, German scientists came up with a most effective cyanide gas; its German trade name was Zyklon B. Furthermore, experiments were begun to discover how to get rid of a multitude of people with the minimum outlay of money and manpower.

This plan to exterminate a whole people was unparalleled in human history in its thoroughness and ruthlessness. Slaughterhouses consumed millions of Jews rounded up from everywhere in Europe. Though stories about the atrocities and the genocide filtered out to the free world, no one would or could believe what was happening behind barbed wire. The facts were too startling and cruel to be credible. How could anyone believe that people were starved to death, and that they were degraded, gassed and burned in giant crematoria. Could anyone imagine making lampshades out of human skin and soap out of human fat, or using people as guinea pigs in all manner of pseudo-scientific experiments?

Hitler's doctrine was to make Germany the ruling race for the entire European continent. He was convinced that "Aryan" Germans were a superior race and he was determined to prove it. Research was initiated to substantiate this belief. Countless numbers of people were murdered and maimed for life, yet not one iota of proof emerged.

What follows, my story, demonstrates but a small part of the multitude of atrocities the Germans perpetrated against the Jewish people, against all of humanity. Even with all that has already been written, and is yet to be written about this tragic period in the history of our people, the full story of the pain and suffering of the victims of the Holocaust can never be told.

## Chapter 1: Usurped -- End of Freedom

The locked door shook. German soldiers pounded on it demanding entrance. "Aufmachen! Aufmachen!", the ominous summons thundered through the quiet apartment building. It was still dark outside. "I'm coming! I'm coming!", shouted the caretaker in a sleepy shaky voice, probably scared out of his wits, as he ran to unlock the front entrance door.

Mother and father jumped out of bed and into some clothes, hurrying into the room in which we children slept. Mother urgently grabbed my hand and pulled me out of bed into her room, where she stuffed me into her bed and covered me tightly with the down cover. "Stay there my child" she said. I could hardly breathe. At the same time, father hid my brother, thrusting Motek beneath the bed where my father had been sleeping, and pulled a chair in front to camouflage his hiding place.

The soldiers' heavy footsteps approached through the entrance hall to the inner courtyard. In the predawn stillness, as I lay shaking uncontrollably, I could hear the caretaker point out the windows of our second floor apartment. "They live up there, through this corridor". The Germans climbed the stairs, their heavy boots clattering on the stone steps, and bashed at our door. "Open up! German police!"

I peeped from my hiding place. My sister Drezl managed to get partially dressed, and then crawled into a far corner to hide. Father and mother were shaking. Mother ran to the door and opened it with trembling hands. Three fierce looking soldiers entered. One held a paper in his hand, and from this list he read my name. "She's, she's my little daughter", said mother, so frightened she could hardly speak. "What do you want with her?" "Where is she?" the soldier persisted, roughly pushing aside my mother. The Germans went through the foyer into the dining room where my grandmother's bed was crammed into a corner.

It was November, 1941 and since the Germans had conquered Poland in September of 1939, life for the large population of Jews in the coal-mining city of Sosnowiec was much changed as a result of the bloody blitzkrieg. My grandmother, a slightly built frail woman of some seventy years, had given up her own room to a Jewish family which was forced to leave the town of Auschwitz when the Germans began building the infamous concentration camp there. My parents and grandmother gladly volunteered to give up the space in our apartment. Consequently, the Jewish Community Directorship assigned Mr and Mrs Stattler and their three year old son to live with us.

The Nazis pulled the bedcovers off my grandmother, a gentle, harmless old woman. "Alte Beine -- old bag" one reflected

and then they went into the room of the family from Auschwitz. They nudged Mr and Mrs Stattler in their bed. "Steif wie ein Stock" remarked one feeling their stiffened, frightened bodies. The soldiers' next stop was my parents' room, where they discovered me.

The room was prettily decorated with a thick Persian rug and an organdy bedspread, hand embroidered by my mother and older sister Drezl. The walls were intricately oil painted, a white pattern on a reddish-brown background. I had often hidden in this room as a small child. Whenever I found myself in trouble, I would tuck myself into a cramped space between the sofa and the bay window. Once, I fell asleep there after a snow fight with a neighbor boy who called me names for being a Jew. My family was nearly ready to call the police when my mother came into this bedroom to draw the draperies and discovered me.

The circumstances of my discovery were far different this time. "You are going with us -- anziehen -- get dressed." And so I did.

Frightened as my parents were, they importuned of the Germans, "What do you want with her? Where are you taking her?" The soldiers didn't even bother to answer. Jews were not human to them.

I embraced mother and father and tried to tell them not to worry, that I surely would be back soon. I left our home as quickly as I could so that the soldiers wouldn't discover my brother and sister, but for some inexplicable reason, I was suddenly aware that I would not return here again.

In the street, a military truck was waiting. "Get in there." I was ordered to climb inside. Several girls from our neighborhood were huddled in the corner. In bewilderment, we stared at the soldiers with their big rifles. The truck started rolling, only to stop a few blocks down the street. Two soldiers jumped out of the back and joined another soldier who disembarked from the cab. The three went into the apartment house in front of which we had parked. Soon they came back with Chaia, a friend of mine. All morning long the truck made stops, picking up its victims, until finally around 9 a.m. the truck shook to a standstill as we arrived at the German police station. Here we met other girls who had been brought there in the same manner.

Friends greeted one another: "Hi Malka, hello Genia, you are here too -- what is happening?" Some cried, a few made a show of bravado - "You'll see, pretty soon we will be back home, I am not afraid." Most of us were quiet, confused, white-faced and trembling, united in our common fears about where the Germans were taking us and what they would do to us.

When our names were processed, we were loaded once again into the military transports. When the trucks were filled with their human cargo, the flaps were closed and we were on our way again.

It was a short trip. Within twenty minutes, we disembarked in front of my high school, a private Jewish school that had opened its doors in 1938. When it first opened, I was very excited and proud to be among its first students. Our community had worked hard to build this school. Lacking funds, the school opened even before the interiors of the classrooms were complete. We were happy there and did not mind these little inconveniences. When the war broke out and the Germans crossed the Polish border, the school was forced to close. The Germans took it over to use as a detention center for Jews before deportation.

Finding myself in front of the school where I had spent some of my happy childhood was like a homecoming, but only for a brief moment. When I glanced around, I saw that the ends of the street were blocked with wooden barricades, where armed soldiers were stopping all vehicles and pedestrian traffic. There were no homes immediately across from the school or on either side of it, so these blockades were effective in keeping anyone from coming near the building.

After entering the building we were escorted to a classroom on the main floor. After a brief wait, we were led single file into the long foyer where German officers sat behind several tables. As we paraded in front of them, they kept looking us over in a crude, humiliating manner. They asked each of us our name, age, and address. Afterward we were taken to another classroom, crowded with bunk beds which were covered with loose straw. By then all I wanted to do was cry. I climbed onto a top bunk so no one would be able to see me. I flopped down on the straw and sobbed until I was very exhausted. Then for what might have been hours, I relived the day's happenings, traveling again through expectancy charged with tension, tension with action, action with dismay, dismay with that awful escalation of fear. Then suddenly, I realized that the girl in the next bunk bed was also racked with tears. The sound of her crying seemed to go on and on, bitter and broken, matching her wretchedness. I reached out my hand and patted her shoulder. She turned to face me and in a whisper almost inaudible she muttered "I wanna go home". We looked at each other, strangers, and started crying all over again. From that moment on, she and I became inseparable for the entire time of our incarceration. When our outburst subsided, we began to get to know each other.

"I am Rose and I am 15; what's your name?" "Ida", I replied, "and I am also 15". "I have a younger sister at home, and look here is a picture of my mother, father, and

my sister -- aren't they beautiful?" Her eyes filled with tears anew. "I don't have any of my family's pictures with me, but", and I proceeded to tell her all about them.

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Rose and I were both very much alike, having long dark braids and nimble bodies, something that would soon be very handy. I had freckles and she had very fair skin. As the youngest of six children, I was sometimes overlooked and felt neglected, but most of the time I was spoiled by my older brothers and sisters. We lived in a large apartment in the building that my parents owned, on the outskirts of Sosnowiec. The rooms in the apartment were heated by masonry and tile fireplaces that burned coal, for Sosnowiec is in the vicinity of many coal mines. The fireplace in my parents' bedroom was the smallest and prettiest, covered with green ceramic tiles, and some of the tiles were fashioned in the image of a lion's head. But the stove of white tiles in the kitchen with the top surface for cooking and an oven for baking, was the most fun for us as children. The stove had a grate beneath which the ashes fell, and in winter, when there was a lot of snow outside, we children would roast potatoes there until they were steaming hot and crisply baked. Then we would eat them while playing games. Though we were not rich people, I cannot remember wanting for anything. My father was a quiet and serious man, slim and of medium height. The top of his head was bald, and around his head he had a halo of gray-black hair. His head was always covered with a hat, since that was the custom of all religious Jewish men. Father looked after the family. In addition to the income from the apartment house, we had a shop that made kitchen sideboards for wholesale. Father participated in the affairs of the Jewish community. He was also the patriarch of the family, but it was my mother who was best known for her good deeds. She was also of medium height, and as was proper, overweight, with mousy gray hair. Yes, an extremely wise woman, outgoing and active in civic affairs. She made a real effort to be very close to her children, coming down to our level when we were young, and keeping our confidence as we grew. My older brothers and sisters would often return to tell her how they spent their evenings when they went out. One of my older brothers was car crazy and owned one of the few private autos in Sosnowiec. Very often, when a part of the engine was in need of repair, he would take it apart on the stool in the kitchen and ask my mother's opinion. She knew nothing about motors, but she was always ready to lend an ear, always interested in what was going on.

Mother stressed the importance of the family and this made my deportation all the more emotionally wrenching. "If you're close to your family, you won't get lost", she would

tell us. But what I remember best about her is not so much what she told us, as what I saw her do. She was at the beck and call of all our tenants, Gentile or Jewish. They would call her when they were sick, no matter whether it was two, three, or four in the morning. "Mrs Proprietor", they would call her, because this was more respectful than using her name. "My child is sick", or "Mrs Proprietor, my son has a fever, please come and see him". In those days, people didn't call the doctor as readily as today, and most of the tenants were of moderate means. A few were coal miners, others were engineers on the railroad, and so on. Mother was an extremely compassionate individual and had the talent for nursing, though she was not a professional. When in need, she had remedies of every description. Even as a small child, I would trail after her, ignoring her admonishments to go back to bed. I remember falling asleep one night as she applied cold compresses to a boy, hour after hour, until his fever came down. She roused me as the sun was rising and the crisis had passed. Another time a child was scalded with milk. This was a poor Jewish family with three children, all living in two rooms. The young daughter was minding her little brother, while the mother and father worked at the market, and she was boiling milk to pasteurize it. The milk was about to foam over the top of the pan, and grabbing it, she slipped, spilling it on her brother's leg. These were third degree burns; I can say that with certainty, because I completed nurses training after the war. My mother again used cold compresses, and drained the large blisters that formed, using a straight razor blade sterilized over a flame. She bathed the wounds three times daily in potassium permanganate until the leg was completely healed.

Just watching my mother was good medical training, and later I was able to help out in the infirmary at the concentration camp. But if I have inherited anything of her, I hope it may be even a small share of her readiness and willingness to help others. That is why I was so hurt that, when the time came that she could have been helped by some of these people, no one extended a hand.

## Chapter 2: The Struggle to Survive

The city of Sosnowiec was comprised of approximately several hundred thousand people. The outskirts were dotted with coal mines and factories. The nearby villages were mostly farming villages with crops of potatoes, cabbage, and wheat. Livestock consisted primarily of hogs, goats, and cows.

A large Jewish population was concentrated in several areas of the town, the most dense being in the center. There, one could find the "Talmud Torah", the institution of Jewish learning, which was the central synagogue, two Hebrew high schools, and a myriad of "Shtiblech" -- praying rooms in private homes. Several renown rabbis, who were at all times surrounded by their disciples, had their seat in the very center of town. Here one could find a flourishing Jewish trade with well to do businesses: merchants dealing in yard goods, shoe wear, manufacturing of overcoats, notions, bedding, and much more. The Jewish restaurants, bakeries, and confectioneries were well known for their delicacies. There was also a Jewish market square, where one could buy almost anything, from live fish to live chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys, as well as kosher meat. There were stands with kitchen utensils, men's underwear and socks, cheap clothing, brooms and brushes, and many other articles. The market was busiest on Thursday and Friday, before the Sabbath. The merchants were Jewish and the majority of the shoppers were also Jewish. On Friday, around noontime, in the midst of all the bustle, merchants started to clean up their stands and pack up their merchandise. Soon, the cubicles were closed and the stands were folded. Well before sunset and the beginning of the "Sabbath", a stillness pervaded and the market closed for the day of rest. All other Jewish owned businesses and stores also closed. There was a minority of Jews who did not observe all the religious rituals and laws. They perhaps would have wanted to keep their businesses open on the "Sabbath", yet they would not dare to perform such a sacrilege in the open and in full view of others; and so without exception, all Jewish trade stopped on Friday evening before the sunset and did not resume again until after the sunset on Saturday evening.

Life was hard for most people, and poverty was very prevalent. In most instances, the father was the sole supporter in a family with many children. He might have been a shoemaker or a tailor; he would have worked from early morning until dusk to eke out a meager living for himself and his family.

Very often, families living on the outskirts of town raised a goat and several hens to provide them with milk and eggs. The animals were kept in shacks which also doubled as coal bins. In order to feed the animals cheaply, children went from door to door with basket in hand, buying potato peels,

for which they paid between two and five grosze, depending on quantity available.

Whether from an impoverished background or a well to do milieu, the youth was beautiful, generally most intelligent, very promising, reaching out toward a better tomorrow. Most young people had an affiliation with a Zionist group, and looked forward to the fulfillment of Palestine as the promised land for the Jews. The future looked good in the hands of these young people, in spite of having grown up in the Diaspora, always exposed to a potentially lethal dose of hatred and anti-Semitism from the Polish people. The venom was handed down by Poles through the generations, and fed, as we used to say, to their children through their mothers' milk. Mothers, in their turn, received it at the Sunday sermon, which they attended with their husbands; thus, whole families were made to believe that the Jews had killed Jesus Christ, and their passions were stirred as if the event had just happened again or anew. Being devout Christians, they seldom missed a sermon; the indoctrination was ever present. No wonder therefore that quite often on our way to or from school, we found ourselves running for safety from groups of pursuing Polish youngsters shouting "let's get these Jews who killed our Jesus Christ". Many times, safety couldn't be reached and a battle ensued resulting in pulled hair, bruises, and bloody noses. More often than not, the older generation of passers-by didn't even try to intervene; instead they too hissed a few remarks like "scabby Jews". Open animosity did not only come from children. University students were well known for their escapades involving Jewish victims. Jews were obliged to serve in the Polish army as equal citizens, but this was not the way they were treated. They were constantly subjected to the chicanery of Polish soldiers and their superiors. For instance, a Jewish soldier was given the nickname of "Moshke" which carried a derogatory connotation.

No one in my family cried about things like this. We were ready to put up our fists and fight if need be. The snow fight that sent me scurrying to the alcove in my parents' room where I fell asleep, was a direct result of this type of insult. I was afraid that the boy's angry mother might be looking for me because I'd stuffed a lot of snow in his mouth. This boy was several years older than me, but I waited until he was busy with his sled and wasn't looking. Then I tackled him, throwing him onto his back and straddling him, while I gave him something else for his mouth with those insults. I was furious! Another incident: my brother Motek got into a brawl with two or three boys because of their catcalls; realizing he was losing, he started to run. When he saw my older brother, Meniek, coming up the street, Motek, shaking with indignation, stood to fight. Help was on the way! The family used to tease Motek that he was only brave when Meniek or Mendel were

around.

Discrimination wasn't legally institutionalized in Poland, but it was a rampant and deeply rooted attitude among the people themselves. It was very hard for a Jew to get admitted to a college or university, and I don't think I ever saw a Jewish postman or a Jew holding any other civil service job.

I was only eight years old when the Nazis passed the first legal act of discrimination in Germany against the Jews, barring them from holding public office. In Poland, though unwritten, this was already true; but in Germany where things were a little better for Jews, this was a setback. Such things were far beyond my comprehension at the time, of course, but that doesn't mean that I wasn't very much aware of the way I was treated by some of the other neighborhood youngsters.

When the Germans passed the anti-Semetic Nuremberg Laws in 1935, rescinding all political and civil rights of Jews, I understood that this very much concerned my parents. We visited back and forth frequently with aunts, uncles, and friends in the community, but now the conversation was not always light-hearted.

News reaching us from across the German border was enough to make anyone sick with fear. There were always many visitors to our home, and a wardrobe, in the long narrow hall off which most of the rooms were located, was always crammed with coats, hats, canes, and umbrellas. There was solemn speculation most of the time in the kitchen, where people congregated at the huge oblong table with its black-and-white marble top. Often there is the impression that the Jews went docilely and passively to their extermination. But no one could imagine, could fathom, the enormity of the horror that was to come! How could normal people imagine such things? When there were reports of atrocities, people hoped the madness would be contained within German borders.

Hitler's occupation of the demilitarized Rhineland in 1939 was excused because everyone wanted to believe that it was a necessary defense measure for Germany. German fighter planes assisting the Fascists under Franco in their struggle for power in Spain, were described as "volunteers" by the official propaganda mechanism, so ably handled by Goebbels. German submarines blockading Spanish ports were called unruly "pirates". As these incidents demonstrate, the mood in Europe -- throughout the world -- was one of appeasement. Except for a few dictatorships with a "will to power", no one wanted another war.

Sosnowiec was perilously close to the German border. But after all, what could we Jews do? We had no weapons with

which to fight, and emigration was almost impossible. Nothing had come of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, and Jews were not free to emigrate to Palestine, despite the pledge of the British Foreign Minister, James Arthur Balfour, supporting the creation of a Jewish national home there.

We heard a lot about the persecution going on in Germany via different channels and especially from the 10,000 Jews deported from Germany in boxcars, as former Polish citizens. They came with only what they could carry in their hands. Everything they left behind became the property of the Germans. I became friends with "Lotte", a girl who together with her family, was thrown out of Hamburg, her birthplace. She arrived in Sosnowiec on one of these transports.

No one wanted the Jews. Hitler would gladly have traded thousands of us for trucks. Even after the war, ships of refugees were turned away from various ports, including New York City, and people died of starvation and thirst.

There was no place to go and nothing to do about Hitler in Germany, so life went on in Poland, and people hoped for the best, as people always do when there is nothing else to be done.

Actually, the year 1939 began very happily for our family. I was intent upon my second year of studies at the new Hebrew high school, although I didn't know what I wanted to do later. We celebrated the Jewish holidays with great pride and the preparedness that was traditional in our family.

Both my sisters became engaged and my parents gave a huge dinner party. Mendel and Meniek struck out on their own and started a dry goods wholesale business. Later that year, my sister Drezl was married. The ceremony was held in the Rabbi's study; afterward, everyone came to our apartment where we had removed the furniture from several rooms to accommodate the large number of guests. Mother was an extremely good cook, and so she prepared geese and turkeys, stuffed spleen and stuffed derma, and all kinds of other delicacies. There were also lots of baked goods, all made by her. I was already looking forward to Miriam's wedding, though she hadn't yet set a date.

By late summer of that same year, however, Jewish residents of Sosnowiec grew increasingly uneasy about being so close to the border. It was known to us that most Polish people who lived close to the German border, were pro-German and would welcome the Germans with open arms. This motivated Jewish families to pack up what they could of their households and to begin moving away from the border. Anything that had wheels was used -- buses, cars, horse drawn buggies were all piled high with people and

belongings. Few families living in our vicinity had a car; because my brother Meniek loved anything that had a motor and also moved, we were one of them. He owned an Austrodemler which could seat six people. Meniek, therefore, found himself deluged with requests to drive entire families inland. Unable to decline, he worked relentlessly day and night for a week. He did this because people were so insistent, though every time he returned, he maintained that fleeing was useless and insane. There was no shelter to be found. Very often he just drove the people to a town that they named and let them off on some street. He saw people with elderly relatives and small children stranded in the streets. Nevertheless, this process of shuttling continued right up to August 30th. That night, after Meniek's return, our family experienced a restlessness we had not known before. My parents finally began to question their reasons for staying behind while most people chose to get away from here. No one went to sleep; there was constant movement between the apartment and the outdoors. Every few minutes, another one of us would go to check on what was happening in the street. What bothered us now was the absolute stillness -- no one was on the roads anymore. Except for an occasional shot far off in the distance, a ghostly silence prevailed.

Approximately four o'clock in the morning, after an all night vigil, our family decided to follow the trend and move inland. Quickly, we packed some belongings into the luggage compartment of the car, but we were now faced with a dilemma. All of us could not possibly fit into this car. We were six children, three sisters and three brothers; one brother-in-law; father and mother; a grandmother who lived with us; my sister's fiance; and a cousin who had been visiting with us. Naturally, everyone had to come along. Therefore, it was resolved that we would drive at a somewhat reduced speed because of the overloaded car. Motek, my younger brother, would drive a motorcycle, and my sister's fiance, Mosze, a bicycle. We rigged a box enclosure in the open trunk where Miriam and I could sit; the rest would ride inside the car. Before entering the car, my father stood in the middle of the yard, looking at the house and at all else around him. With tears streaming down his cheeks he uttered, "there goes the work of my hands". He was sure that we would, we should never return here.

This was how we left our home, in the dawn hours of August 31, 1939. On the way we decided to stop in the next city where my mother's brother, Uncle Maier, lived with his wife, son Mendel, and daughter who was also named Miriam. Both of these children, my cousins, were named after the same deceased relatives as were my brother and sister. We arrived at Uncle Maier's at seven in the morning and were prepared to stay just long enough to say goodbye. When Uncle Maier came out to meet all of us, looking us over, he declared us to be either fools or insane. He had just heard

reports that the Germans were massing troups all around Poland. He said, "it's no use for you to drive inland and suffer hardship by not being able to find lodging, and still encounter the Germans there instead of in your own home". We remained at Uncle Maier's for about an hour undecided, debating what to do. Finally, we decided to return home.

For weeks, all movement had been directed inland. Because our overloaded car was now traveling in the opposite direction, people on the road waved to us and shouted, "look, people are returning home; no war, no war, there will be no war!".

Well, we did arrive home, and at the time we were quite happy to be home. Simcha, our cousin, returned to his family; we unloaded everything and parked the car in the garage. Meniek, tired from driving these many days and nights, retired early to bed to finally give himself a well deserved rest.

Next morning, everyone got up at a decent hour except Meniek who was still suffering from lack of sleep. After breakfast, Mendel and Motek decided to go to town, Motek for the fun of it and Mendel to see his girlfriend.

About two hours later, we heard a rapid succession of shots coming closer and getting louder. Our apartment house was located on the perimeter of the city, on the opposite side from where the German army was now entering the city. We rushed into the street where we encountered people running, shouting, "the Germans are here". At almost the same moment we noticed Motek. He was running as he had never before run in his life. He stopped when he reached us; he leaned against the wall of the apartment house, exhausted, his face ashen, completely drained of color, and covered with beads of perspiration. He managed to utter "the Germans are here", and then he fainted. We washed his face with cold water and when he came to, he was still visibly shaken by the events which had sent him running for his life. He said, "As I was walking along 3rd of May street (the main downtown street), tanks suddenly appeared out of nowhere, sporadically shooting -- the tanks were followed by trucks and motorcycle troops; when I realized what was happening, I started running, following back streets and I didn't stop until I reached home. The Germans are here; oh! what are we going to do?"

The German war objective in Poland was to achieve a speedy victory. Their decisively superior "Wehrmacht" and "Luftwafe" attacked with incredible speed from both east and west, by air and on the ground. Division after division of highly motorized machinery arrived, having telephone and telegraph communication available at their fingertips. The mass of soldiers included some who were dressed in black leather suits, wearing steel helmets inscribed with the

skull and crossbones insignia; they came on wheels, resembling blood thirsty robots who would overrun the country.

Within the first two days, they destroyed the Polish Air Force, and on the fifth day, their Panzer divisions drove deep into the center of the country. The Polish army was neither sophisticated enough nor sufficiently equipped and prepared to withstand the onslaught of the German "Blitzkrieg". At several places, the Poles made a valiant stand, but soon they were shattered by the enormous German machinery. The attack started in the dawn hours of September 1, and on September 17, Poland was almost entirely occupied by both the forces of Adolf Hitler and of the Soviet Union, which had entered into a non-aggression pact with the victorious German army.

We were all gathered at home now except for Mendel who had gone to visit his girlfriend. Luck was with us in that we lived on the other side of town from which the troops had entered the city. It took the Germans until sometime into the night to advance into our area.

Meanwhile, Polish people arriving from the center of town continued to inform everyone of what was happening there. Running in the middle of the street, they would shout - "Hey! Do you know what the Germans are doing? They go from house to house, shouting -- 'all Jewish men out!' -- and then they shoot them on the spot".

By then Meniek was already awake and had joined all of us in the street. On hearing this news, he declared, "Mom, Dad, I will not stay here and wait for the Germans to kill me. I am going to hide out somewhere in a village nearby, until it's safe to come back. Please, Mom and Dad, understand me, I just can't stay here". "I'm going with you", Moshe intoned, and off they went, running with all their might.

We now had to decide what to do with our men since, for the moment, they were the ones in danger. Dad, Motek, and Yosl, who were the only men left, went into hiding in my parents bedroom; we moved a big wardrobe in front of the entrance to the bedroom as a camouflage. We knew well how flimsy a hiding place this was, but for the time being, until we found a better one, it had to be all right. The Germans had not reached our side yet, and the news coming from the inner city where the largest concentration of the Jewish population lived, was horrifying. Dusk, and then evening was rapidly approaching and with it the fear of the oncoming night. Twenty four tenants lived in our apartment house, most of whom were not Jewish. We thought, surely one tenant would take the risk of letting us spend the night with them. However, my parents thought that we would be safer somewhere else. Adjacent to our apartment house stood a row house owned by a man who had shown kindness toward us many times

before, though at times we questioned his sincerity, mainly when he had drunk too much. On those occasions he was boisterous about his negative feelings toward Jews in general, but with one exception -- he contended that he liked us. His name was Mr Polsky and he was a homosexual, though he had a wife and two daughters. He bleached his hair platinum blond and at times his lips were painted bright red. He had a slinky springy walk that attracted attention. Mr Polsky had his eye on my younger brother, and every time that he could get a hold of him in the street, he tried to make advances. Motek, who was eighteen years old, despised him and always tried to avoid him. Not having much choice, this then was the man my mother approached with a request to let us spend the night in his home. In spite of the terrible risk involved, he consented. Under the cover of darkness, my parents, brother, brother-in-law, grandmother, my two sisters and I sought shelter with this non-Jewish family.

Our hosts retired to sleep in their bedroom while we all occupied their living room where we bedded down on chairs and on the floor. This night etched itself into my memory forever as a most horrible night. Motek and I bedded down on top of my Mother's coat which was spread out on the hard floor; the others sat up in chairs. We both drifted into and out of sleep. Every time we heard some noise in the street, our eyes jerked open and we looked at each other in horror; Motek's face and body covered with perspiration. We heard shooting and the movement of tanks and army trucks in the distance. Sometime in the night, the Germans occupied our part of town, but contrary to the way they dealt with Jews in the inner city, here they didn't bother us. Perhaps this was because there were not so many of us in this part of the city, or perhaps their lust for killing had been sated for the time being. We were relieved to see daybreak come, and with the first rays of light, we returned to our apartment. Of course, our three men immediately went back into hiding in the bedroom. In the meantime, we were terribly worried about Mendel who still hadn't returned home. We didn't know where he was or what had happened to him. Frankly, we feared for his life very much, especially after hearing the horror stories relayed to us by the Polish people. Right from the start, as the Germans unleashed their murderous tactics toward the Jewish population, most of the Polish people derived visible pleasure from it, and for the Germans, this attitude provided fertile ground for more imaginative atrocities.

It was therefore not surprising that several of our Polish neighbors came to us to report on the outcome of the night after the occupation by the German army. They told us that the inner city was littered with "dead Jews", and that the hill opposite city hall was fully covered with them. A smirk on the face and visible glee usually accompanied this description.

Toward noon, when Mendel still hadn't shown up, we really became desperate. Miriam and I decided to go to his girlfriend to look for him.

As we set out on our way, we decided to go via city hall, to see if indeed it was true what people were telling us. We crossed a small bridge and rounded a bend in the street from where at a distance of several hundred yards we had an unobstructed view of the hill and the plaza behind city hall. Indeed, the hill was entirely covered with sprawling bodies. I gasped and covered my eyes with my hands since I couldn't stand the sight; then abruptly I turned and ran back home. Miriam continued on. When she returned home, she told us that she went to the hill in spite of the fear and the revulsion she felt. She looked over most of the bodies to see if Mendel was among them. She did not find him there, but that didn't mean that he was still alive. Among the women who were looking for their loved ones were a few acquaintances who told her not to go into the city, that it wasn't safe to wander about; she then returned home. Toward evening, the door suddenly opened and Mendel appeared, looking like a ghost who had come back from somewhere beyond the grave. We heaved a great sigh of relief and thanked God for his safe return. After he washed and had a bite to eat, he recalled for us what he had gone through since the time the Germans had occupied the city. On entering the city, the Germans rushed into Jewish quarters, as if directed by someone who knew the city. They went from house to house shouting "alle Juden Manner raus! -- all Jewish men out!" When they came out, they were shot right in the yard. If they didn't come out, the Germans went in after them and shot them inside. While all this was going on, Mendel was at his girlfriend's apartment. Hearing the Germans approaching the apartment house, all the men inside ran to the basement to hide. When Mendel ran down to the basement there was not much room left since many things were also stored there. Searching for his own hiding place, he noticed a trap door leading to a sub-basement which was a storage space for potatoes. He and another man quickly descended into it and closed the trap door behind them. It didn't take the Germans long to ransack the apartment house and rapidly make their way down to the basement. Once there, they just opened fire and shot everyone in sight. Both Mendel and the other man who was hiding with him were spared only because other men who were shot had fallen on top of the trap door blocking it from the Germans' view. Horrified, the two of them lay in their hiding place a long time not daring to move or to make a sound. They were choked with fear and drenched with the blood seeping through the crevices. This is the way they remained all through night and for most of the next day, until they finally found the courage to pry open the door and run home.

The first rage and shooting spree had somewhat subsided by

now, and so we decided to spend the night in our own apartment; it passed uneventfully and we even managed to get some sleep. Next day the Jewish community started to bury its dead. Among them were many of our acquaintances and friends; a close school friend of mine lost both her father and brother on that first night.

The Germans soon employed other tactics. They herded Jewish men into the huge basement beneath the City Hall building. There, the men were held for days and sometimes even for weeks without food or water. When finally released, numerous casualties were discovered; many had died suffering a stroke or a heart attack.

Now, more than a week after the German occupation, there was still no sign of Meniek or Moshe. This was Monday morning and a sunny day. We had just finished eating breakfast, and what a breakfast it was -- hot, home baked black bread with farmers cheese and coffee. Last Thursday, dad, who had by then decided to leave his hiding place, went out to a village and traded some material (that had been intended to be used for sheets, a part of Miriam's trousseau) for a half sack of flour, some potatoes, cheese, and dried mushrooms. Saturday night, mother put up dough to sour, and Sunday night she mixed up a big batch of dough to rise over night. This morning, she and Miriam arose at dawn. Miriam decided to go in search of Meniek and Moshe. Mother busied herself with bread baking. The smell of freshly baked bread permeated the apartment and awakened us with our salivary glands primed. After breakfast, with our hunger well satisfied, we sat around the table contemplating the day ahead; mother paced the floor, her face mirroring the worry inside. To no avail, father tried to calm her and soothe her fears. Suddenly, she decided to go into the street in front of the house to watch for Miriam and the two men; I immediately trailed after her. We stood on the sidewalk in front of the tall wooden gate leading into the courtyard. Every so often we would crane our necks in each direction, looking for a sign of them; then we would let our gaze wander over the small lake across from the house and behind it, to the church with the beautiful garden. There were few people in the street now. Suddenly, in the distance and to the left of us, we noticed a group of German soldiers on bicycles briskly pedaling in our direction, rapidly closing the distance between us. Our first reaction was to run inside the gate and hide, but we were afraid that if they saw us running, they might pursue us. We therefore remained standing rooted to the spot, hoping that they would quickly pass us by. Mother stealthily grabbed my hand and squeezing it tightly she whispered to me "stay quiet my child". The soldiers came ever closer and soon they were in front of our house; they stopped, and with that my heart seemed to stop as well - it gave a jump that I felt in my throat. Mother further tightened her grip on my hand; her face was drained of color. Four soldiers got off their bicycles; one was

obviously the leader, corpulent with a protruding beer belly and a red face. It was a warm, pretty day and the soldiers were perspiring profusely, especially the fat one. The leader held a scrap of paper in his hand from which he read "Kaliska 37", our address. He looked at my mother and said, "there is a car registered at this address". She replied "yes", trying to sound unafraid and normal; "if you follow me, I will lead you to it". We entered the courtyard and walked toward the garage situated at the other end. Behind us came the soldiers, and behind them a procession of Polish youngsters and even a few grownups, curiosity seekers. They managed to gather around us as we opened the garage door and let the Germans in. The Germans immediately tried to start the car, but unfortunately did not succeed in their attempt. They tried again and again, cursing "Verflucht nocheinmal!", but to no avail. "Where is the driver of the car?" they shouted. "Bring the driver here, aber schnell!" shouted the sergeant. "He is not here", replied my mother, "and I don't know when he will be back". We prayed silently for them not to go in search of the driver and find the men. The curiosity seekers, who had in the meantime crowded around the car, decided to be helpful and pushed the car into the middle of the yard. Fatso, who was mopping his brow and neck with a big handkerchief, sent one of the youngsters for beer. Once again they tried to start the motor and again they failed. The youngsters returned with four bottles of beer which the soldiers drank in big gulps, interspersed with "Verflucht nocheinmal!". They talked among themselves and then the sergeant turned to mother. "You will deliver the car to our garrison, and you have until 3PM. If you fail to comply with our order, we will be back to see to it that you do." He tried to tell us where the garrison was located, and then they left. -- What were we to do now? The car had to be delivered. We had no choice in the matter but to have Mendel drive the car, even though his life would be in great danger. After tinkering with the car's engine for a while, Mendel was able to start it, and soon mother and he were on their way.

Barely an hour passed and suddenly there was a commotion in the backyard. We ran to the windows to look. Meniek, Moshe, and Miriam, sitting in a sporty Fiat, had just driven through the gate and into the open garage. We all ran down to welcome them back; I jumped straight into Meniek's arms. "Oh! Where did you get that car?" I asked, and rapidly I proceeded to tell them about the soldiers and where mom and Mendel had gone. While they began cleaning up from a week of filth and sweat, Meniek and Moshe told us how they tried to escape by traveling inland, until they ran head on into Germans who had penetrated from the opposite direction. Slowly, they started retracing their way home. The roads were strewn with abandoned vehicles; some had run out of gasoline, others were damaged. At one point, they came upon the small Fiat standing in the middle of a field. At first they sat down in its shade to relax for a while. Then it

became apparent to them that the car was abandoned. They decided to try driving it home, instead of having to walk the long way back. They were also in luck; it seemed that there was enough gasoline left in the tank. While they were driving home, Miriam, walking, was getting very weary; her feet were starting to blister since she had walked the many kilometers leading out of the city and through small villages. Suddenly she spotted Meniek and Moshe in the open car. The streets were crowded with people of all ages, lugging their meager belongings in bundles; they were returning home, mostly on foot and on bicycles. The car could only move at a painfully slow pace. Miriam ran shouting toward the car "Meniek, Moshe! Stop, stop!" They stopped and she fell into their arms locked in a tearful embrace. Now they were home, exhausted.

About two o'clock, Mendel and mother returned home with the Austrodemler, and we had a happy reunion. They had tried to deliver the car, but they had driven to the wrong garrison and those officials wouldn't accept it. The officials also didn't know which garrison was responsible for the order requesting the car, but mother at least had gotten a written statement to prove that she had tried to comply with that order. Around four o'clock, the soldiers showed up again, angry and ready to dismember us. The Austrodemler stood in the middle of the yard. "You gave me the wrong directions", mother said, and gave them the affidavit that showed she was telling the truth. After reading it, the Germans calmed down a bit, but they insisted that the driver of the car come out and drive them back to their garrison. Mother nudged Drezl to go and fetch Mendel. We now had a small crowd of Polish people surrounding us. Suddenly, a young Polish man stepped out of the crowd and in a loud voice announced, "these Jews have another car hiding in the garage". The soldiers immediately proceeded toward the garage where of course they found the sporty Fiat, a car to their liking. At the same moment Mendel arrived, and behind him, Drezl. The Germans were now infuriated. One soldier grabbed Mendel by the neck and threw him against the outside wall. "Du verfluchte Jude" he cursed; "YOU will pay for it". He pulled out his gun and was about to shoot Mendel, but Drezl jumped toward the soldier, grabbing his arm. "Please, please!", she pleaded, "don't shoot him; come with me; I will prove to you -- the car engine is still warm. This is because he found the car in a field and drove it home only a short while ago". The soldier let himself be pulled into the garage and allowed Drezl to lay his hand on top of the hood. Indeed, the metal was still warm and the German who was convinced replaced the gun in his holster murmuring something to himself. He climbed into the Fiat and it started immediately. As he backed it out of the garage, the other three soldiers jumped in. He drove toward the gate, shouting, "you had better deliver the other car", and they were gone. After a while, the people went their way and we returned to the apartment. Inside, mother pulled

Drezl toward her, in a tight embrace. "You could have been killed out there, together with Mendel. Thank God for your presence of mind." To get rid of the problem, we delivered the car the next day.

Now that we were all together again, we tried not to move out of the apartment too much. Soon, however, this proved to be impossible. We had to stand in line for food. This in itself, we soon realized, required some skill. The problem was that one member of a family kept a place in a line, and an hour later five uncles and six cousins arrived to take their rightful place next to that one member. Instead of moving forward, the queue grew longer, bulging in some places because of the new arrivals. Quite often, before we finally arrived at the window, they ran out of food or bread, and we went home empty-handed. One day Yosl got up at daybreak to stand in a bread line. Noon arrived and he was still not back. Drezl went out to see what had happened. After a long while she returned in tears. "They have got Yosl", she cried. "They surrounded the bread line and took out all the men; then they told them to climb into the trucks and drove them away." We inquired of the authorities, we talked to people, we prayed, waited and hoped, but Yosl never returned. Drezl lost her husband. Yosl was the first victim from our family. We had tasted the first bitter pill of the Nazi fury. But so did many other families. In the beginning it looked as though the atrocities were directed mainly at Jewish men. Especially now, after Yosl was murdered, the men in our family felt this threat and reacted accordingly. They decided to run away to Russia. They were determined in their decision not to remain under German occupation and live in the uncertainty of what the next hour could bring. Under existing circumstances, my parents didn't try to dissuade them. However, they insisted that Motek, the youngest of the three men, should remain. "Go", my parents said, "and send back word if we should join you". They undertook a difficult task since they had to cross almost the entire breadth of Poland on foot, while avoiding being caught by the Germans. Then there was the matter of crossing the border into Russia.

My mother was a "jack of all trades". She could do anything she put her mind to. This time she stayed up all night, sewing warm pants for each of the men. Next morning she displayed three pairs of brown corduroy riding pants, snuggly fitting over the calf, and ballooning out to the side from the knee. The boys loved it. All three put them on for the road with warm knee socks and heavy boots. Preparing for the winter, each took a warm jacket, spare underwear, and of course food, in a knapsack. Again, we bid them a tearful farewell. "May the Almighty watch over you" dad blessed them as we each embraced for the last time. We watched them disappear at the street corner.

There were only seven of us left at home now. Life was difficult and worrisome. Each new day brought new restrictions for the Jewish population, and in each hour of our day, we were uncertain of survival, as was proven to us by Yosl's disappearance, and by friends' and neighbors' family members being killed or at best being taken away never to return.

Now, approximately eight weeks after the occupation, two to three times weekly in the middle of the night, two uniformed German officers entered our apartment house, came straight to our door, banging on it and demanding: "Aufmachen, Juden Bande, Aufmachen!". Their voices reverberated throughout the entire apartment house. Mother would run to open the door with shaking hands. Once inside, they would get us all out of bed and make us line up in the middle of the dining room. We would stand there in our night clothes, trembling. The two Germans, whose names we later found out were Albert and Lorenz, circled around us sternly demanding us to tell them where we had hidden the weapons. My parents tried telling them that we never had any weapons, whereupon one of the officers would, with his heavy boot, step on my father's bare feet and hiss into his face, "YOU old synagogue worshipper, where are the weapons, where have you hidden them?" My father's face went white with pain as the German deliberately shifted his weight, thereby inflicting more pain. Meanwhile, the other officer walked around the room poking at the furniture with his long sleek stick. The two were obviously having fun harassing us. After an hour or two, they would go away and leave us alone, but not without warning us that they would be back. Their tactic of persecution made life unbearable, and yet we didn't know why they had singled us out in this manner, and what if anything we could do to avoid it. One day uncle Maier and Miriam paid us a visit to find out how we were managing. After being told about the nightly visits, uncle Maier suggested that if there were any kitchen breakfronts left in our workshop, we should present each German with one, and then perhaps they would leave us alone. As it happened, no more breakfronts remained; the last shipment had left just before war broke out. However, there was enough material available for some to be made.

During our next nighttime visit, father mustered all of his courage and said to the officer, "We don't have any weapons, but we used to manufacture kitchen breakfronts, and there is plenty of material left. We can make two breakfronts for you which you could send home to your families." One of the Germans sternly approached my father, poking him in the ribs, and lifted his booted foot as if to step on my father's feet again. However, this time he did not do it. Instead, he inclined his head toward my father and said again, "You old synagogue worshipper, ok", whereupon both left. We had the two breakfronts made up within a week. The Germans came with a truck and hauled them away; they

never bothered us again.

It seemed however that these two Germans were particularly obnoxious in our neighborhood, sometimes even to the Polish people. As a result, Albert was shot in the knee by a sniper, causing him to have a stiff knee. From then on, he was nicknamed and known in the neighborhood as "Lame Albert".

But if it wasn't Albert or Lorenz, it was somebody or something else. The Germans were very creative in finding ways to make our lives increasingly more difficult. Every day brought new decrees. Placards with information of what to do and what not to do were plastered all over town and were evident to us at every step along our way. They decreed that Jews had to wear a white armband with a blue star of David. We had to register and deliver all motorized and moving vehicles; we had to hand over all jewelry, and gold and silver articles at a designated place. We were forbidden to enter Aryan businesses, and certain streets and sidewalks were off limits. There was a special curfew for Jews. We received food ration cards, but more often than not there was a shortage of food, and the cards were not honored. In fact, there was a shortage of everything. Soon children were standing at street corners, peddling such items as matches, razor blades, and saccharin. They held their wares in cardboard boxes, in the palms of their hands, and chanted, "buy saccharin, buy saccharin, sweet life, bitter death".

After the initial killing rage had subsided, the heads of the Jewish community established contact with the German authorities, and prevailed on them to work together for their mutual benefit. The Germans agreed, and on the surface it seemed that the two groups in charge worked hand in hand; in fact, this proved not to be the case. Using the ruse of teaching the "stereotypical, lazy Jew how to work and obey orders", the Germans schemed their diabolical plan of annihilation.

One day it was decreed that all males of a given age had to register at a designated place. Many men did, for fear that they would otherwise be shot. Among them was one of my cousins. These men were put on military trucks and driven out of town. Later, we found out from a few who lived to tell the story, that the men were driven to the Russian border. There they were told to disembark and run to the other side; as they did, the Germans shot after them and the Russians shot at them.

From a man who earned his livelihood smuggling himself back and forth across the Russian border in order to bring news to families of their loved ones, we learned that our men had made it safely across to Russia and at present were in the town of Lwow near the border. That evening we reached a

decision and formed a plan of action. Mother and Miriam were going to smuggle themselves to Lwow and examine the existing situation to see if we could all make it there. After several days of preparing, they set out on their journey.

Almost three weeks of waiting in agony, worry, and uncertainty passed. Our eyes felt like they would pop out of their sockets from the constant lookout that we kept. The day finally came when mother returned home, pale, weary to the bone, and shabby looking. She and Miriam had successfully crossed into Russia and arrived in Lwow, where they found our men. But Lwow was a city bulging at the seams with refugees escaping the Germans. To find an apartment for a family was nearly impossible. Often, six to ten people occupied a single room. Such was the case for our men; they boarded in a room with other people. Mother could not visualize all of us leaving home and joining them in this impossible situation. She decided to come back and wait to see if things would improve. Miriam, however, decided to remain with her brothers and her fiance. Mother promised to periodically send them word of the existing situation; if the treatment of Jews began to improve, then they would return home. As once before, mother paid a set sum of money to a man who was to smuggle her across the border back to Poland. At dusk the smuggler gathered his group of people at a prearranged place in the woods several kilometers from the border. He advised them to follow him at the crossing, to be very quiet, and to keep a low profile. When it was completely dark, he led them through the woods and they ran stooped behind him. Somebody fell, but quickly picked himself up and continued on. It was hard for them to follow each other because of the trees, so they just ran to keep up with the smuggler. They were approaching the river -- the border. At this point the water was shallow enough for a crossing. But something went wrong -- shots were fired and guards shouted "Halt! Halt!". Momentarily the group dispersed, running in every direction. Mother and another man kept running along the riverside; some distance away they stopped exhausted. Total darkness surrounded them and only the noise of the river waters lapping at the shore could be heard. They took stock of their situation. Realizing that they were caught in the middle of the border with guards on each side, they decided to continue across; yet, not knowing the depth of the river at this point, they wondered how. They continued along until they saw the river narrowing. Then they came upon a fallen tree which they dragged to the river and on which they crossed to the other side. To be caught on the German side surely meant certain death, but with a little luck and a lot of caution they made it to the nearest village. Here, mother bid the man farewell and continued on her own. She was weary, dirty, and scratched up from the ordeal. There was no way to get lodging anywhere at this hour and so she found a pile of rocks behind a cluster of homes and there

she curled up to spend the remainder of the night. With her warm coat and shawl wrapped around her tightly, she soon fell asleep, only to be awakened by the barking of dogs in the distance. She knew that she could not stay here long, that she must not be found by anyone in this position, or they would suspect her of something. Nobody should know that she is Jewish, otherwise she would be in trouble. As soon as light came onto the horizon, she groomed herself a bit and started on the road again. Soon she met a farmer in a horse drawn wagon. She called a greeting to him and asked about the road to town. About three kilometers was his answer. "Could I get a lift?" she enquired. He pulled the horses' reins to stop the long wagon. She climbed into the open end, he smacked his lips, and the horses started trotting again as the wagon shook on the uneven country road. Making conversation, mother found out that she was outside the city of Krosno. When they arrived at the village, the farmer stopped the wagon in front of the general store. "Thank you" she said to the farmer as she got off the wagon. She crossed the road and walked to the little square where she saw a water pump. She pumped some water into her hands and washed them and her face, then she drank thirstily from her hands. She cleaned her coat a bit and straightened out her mousy hair. She was hungry and decided to go into the store. "Dzien dobry -- good morning" she said. "I am on my way home, a long way off, and I would like to buy some bread and maybe a piece of farmer cheese." The woman proprietor gave her a curious look, but sold her a half loaf of black bread and a quarter kilo farmer cheese. "Daj Boze zdrowie -- God give you health" was the Polish greeting with which my mother left the store. She walked to a meadow where she sat down on the grass and ate some of the food. After resting a bit, she enquired of a passerby the direction to the city of Krakow. She was told to follow the road to the next village and continue on. The road was dusty and long; finally she came upon a railroad track and decided to follow it. She continued walking until she came to a small train station, a welcome sight. When she entered the one room building, she noticed two men sitting on a bench in a corner. They were speaking to each other in Yiddish. What do they say -- misery loves company? Mother steered directly toward them and started talking to them in Yiddish. While they were enquiring of each other where they were from and where they were going, a group of young Polish men came in. They were a rowdy bunch, but though they were obviously having a good time, one overheard the three talking in Yiddish. "Hey!", they called out, "these are Jews sitting in that corner -- Moshke! They are supposed to be circumcised; let's check them out. C'mon let's have some fun." As they proceeded toward them, the three quickly ran for the door and out. Mother and one man succeeded in running away toward an open field. The Polish bunch however caught the other man and started pushing him around. Suddenly they picked him up by his arms and legs and swung him to the accompaniment of "one, two, and three!". They

tossed him into the air. Luckily, the man landed on soft ground. Quickly he picked himself up and ran off, also toward where the others had fled. One of the Poles started in pursuit, but the others called, "Janek, stop, let's fetch the Germans with the dogs; they will take care of them". Hearing this, the trio ran as fast as their legs could carry them. Mother couldn't keep up with the two men and was lagging behind. The man who was limping also began to slow down. As soon as they were out of sight, the man in front stopped and waited until the others joined him. Ahead, they saw a farmhouse; off to the side was an outhouse. They decided to hide in the outhouse for the time being; just in case the Germans pursued them with dogs, the stench from there might mislead them. They stayed there until rested, and after assuring themselves that no one was coming, resumed walking. From then on, they tried to avoid public places, and arriving at the outskirts of Krakow, they separated. The rest of the way, mother decided to go by train. She took a chance and was lucky. She arrived home very weary and emotionally exhausted; we could hardly recognize her.

Several days passed when bad news reached us. It seemed that our family in Lwow had become impatient and disillusioned with the Russians and the existing situation and decided to return home without waiting for further news from us. They joined a group which hired a man to smuggle them back into Poland; by then this had become a daily "routine" occurrence. The smuggler divided the group in two. Miriam and Meniek were in one group, Mendel and Moshe in the other. Meniek's and Miriam's group went first. The Russian crossing went all right, but on the Polish side the Germans started shooting. Miriam and Meniek ran back to the Russian side, but the Russians also began to shoot. In order not to wind up dead, they raised their arms and let themselves be arrested by the Russians. The other group never attempted the crossing and instead returned to Lwow. Meniek and Miriam were immediately separated and were each put in a detention center in Lwow. They were accused of espionage and were given sentences without ever standing trial. Meniek was sent to Siberia to do hard labor, and Miriam, who was only nineteen years old, was also sent deep into Russia to serve two years in prison. Mendel and Moshe also wound up being separated. Neither Meniek nor Mendel survived. Miriam suffered terrible hardships in Russian prison. She was grouped together with many imprisoned prostitutes and women from the lowest spheres of Russian society. Although her lot was hard during her imprisonment, she was yet to experience her hardest time after her release, having no place to go, no roof over her head and no one to turn to for help. It was during springtime that her release became effective. She was ordered to appear at a certain office where she was assigned a job at a tannery. The job consisted of separating hides which were piled outdoors, and which froze into a solid bunch during the

harsh winter. Spring came; the warm temperatures defrosted the hides, and the mound was covered with crawling worms. The stench was unbearable, and during the process of separating the hides, the worms crawled onto her body. They were both inside and outside her clothing. She was so distraught by this job that she couldn't sleep or eat; she imagined the worms were everywhere, in her food and even in her bed. After being on this job for a week, she refused to continue her work, and consequently, was sent back to prison. Once free again, she lived in the most dire of circumstances, constantly bucking Russian government regulations, which was the only way for her to survive. Finally, she met a man whom she married, and after becoming pregnant, she was exempted from working. The marriage had saved her. Together they met the harsh demands of life, until the war ended and they were able to be repatriated.

Meanwhile, back home the German authorities set up several work shops around town, but only a small fraction of the people managed to procure employment. The ones who did, received a special ID card which was of great value at the time to the holder who, at least for a while, enjoyed a certain immunity. The Germans were telling us that those who worked were worthwhile individuals and those who did not, were expendable parasites. To demonstrate this, they released anyone with the special ID during the routine street catching procedures. This charade, however, did not last very long, and the ID card proved to be of no value in preventing someone from being shipped off to a labor camp or a concentration camp, or from being annihilated.

In time, Jewish community authorities procured several acres of land outside of city limits, yet not too far from where the Jewish population was most dense. They earmarked the land for agricultural use, and it was parceled out into squares, twenty feet on a side. These parcels were then rented out for a very nominal fee to Jewish people who wished to work the land and plant on it. The success of this undertaking was immense. Everyone wanted a share, but there just wasn't enough land, and so, the ones who were first and those who had an "in" with the administration, were successful in leasing a parcel.

In the spring, hundreds of people turned out to work on their staked out land. They tilled and raked the soil, fertilized with manure, seeded, and after that weeded. The place was most crowded in the mornings and evenings, on weekends, and especially on Sundays. Vegetables and flowers sprouted; the lucky renters beamed with pride. Entire families were involved in the gardening, and all around, people promenaded and admired the "works of art". The place was soon nicknamed "Dzialki" for the word Parcels. More and more Jewish people were turning out to admire the parcels, until it became a meeting place. We used to say, "meet me at the Dzialki".

Then one day, the Germans cordoned off the place with a detachment of SS. They grabbed enough people to fill their trucks and shipped them out. For a while, no one showed up anymore at the parcels; after some time had gone by, slowly they came back to tend to their gardens, and soon more showed up to watch. For a short while the Germans stayed away from the place, but one day they again staged a catching party. After that, very few returned to the Dzialki.

## Chapter 3: The Bread Lines

It looked like we would never learn how to obtain the allocated ration of bread. This was an art of its own. We had to stand in long lines for hours, and most important, we had to be there the moment night curfew was over. But even then, many times we returned home empty handed. There just wasn't enough flour with which to bake all the bread that was needed.

I remember one specific week when, try as best we could, we could not get any bread. We grew desperate and decided to go to an Aryan bakery, where bread was in ample supply. The owner of the bakery was a friendly Christian woman who knew us well; we therefore hoped that she would be willing to sell us a loaf of bread. The bakery was about a mile and a half away from home.

Bearing in mind that Jews were not allowed to enter Aryan premises, we took a chance on the following simple scheme. Mother and I slipped on the required white armbands, but on her shoulders she hung a shawl concealing her band. She hooked her right arm through my left, to cover up my band and off we went. We passed a succession of cobbled streets. There were shops on both sides of the street, mostly two story; a queue of women gossiped outside a grocery store. Away from the queue it seemed almost unnaturally quiet. We walked on and finally came to the bakery, which we entered. The owner did not let on that she knew my mother or me, and she sold us a loaf of bread. At this point we were completely unaware that a woman outside the bakery had recognized my mother, although our armbands were still concealed. As we left the bakery, this woman began to shout in her loudest voice, "these Jews are stealing our bread, they are stealing our bread!". We were stunned. In no time at all, a crowd had gathered around us -- perhaps a hundred people -- men, women, and children. We could not see the street anymore, so many people had surrounded us. They began pulling my braids and kept shouting, "these Jews, these dirty Jews are eating our bread!". I remember wishing for the earth to open and to swallow me, I was so ashamed. Mother tried to lie by telling them that she had bought the bread for an Aryan neighbor who was ill and who could not fetch it for herself. But to no avail. Finally, seeing no way out, mother said she would go to bring the woman, to prove her story. Surprisingly, they let her go! While mother ran home for help, I was left alone with this mad and hostile crowd.

To my dying day, I shall never forget those faces around me, and the fear and humiliation I felt.

After twenty minutes, which seemed an eternity for me, two of my former playmates, Aryan girls, came running, holding long wooden sticks in their hands. The girls broke into the

middle of the crowd and began shouting at them, "let her go, she bought the bread for us". Then, one of these girls pushed me toward the opening they had created in the crowd and ordered me to run. I took off and ran as fast as I could, but the people, and especially the children pursuing me, were rapidly catching up to me. I made it to the main street corner, not too far from the streetcar stop and about a block away from our home. There they caught me by my braids and held onto me while a man ran to the streetcar stop to summon the German police. A German soldier happened to be on the streetcar, and so they summoned him to deal with me for the crime committed. At the same time mother returned with Drezl to be at my side. The soldier enquired of us where we lived and followed us to our home, while hundreds of people tailed us to see what the German would do to us. The mob was so bloodthirsty and hateful, with their chanting: "Dirty Jews, we won't let them eat our bread!". At home, my mother explained our predicament to the soldier and why we went to buy bread at the Aryan bakery; to our total surprise, the soldier showed genuine compassion. He actually said to us that he understood why we had done it. He also told us that he came from Berlin; he had not seen his family in a long while and was very concerned about them. He then promised to bring us some bread and was true to his word. For several more weeks, he continued bringing bread, until, without notice, he abruptly disappeared from our lives.

In order to supplement our inadequate food rations, mother and father set out for a village one day, to exchange goods for food with the farmers. One could not buy much with money these days. The venture turned into a disaster. Both mother and father disappeared. We didn't hear from them or know what had happened to them for several months. We were sure that they had been apprehended by the Germans, and perhaps even killed. We were desperate and heart broken. We searched and enquired everywhere, including of the authorities, but to no avail. After we had almost given up hope of ever seeing them again, miraculously, one day mother returned, haggard and weary. Our happiness knew no bounds. She confirmed our suppositions; both she and father had been apprehended by the Germans at a nearby village. They were separated and put to work. Mother scrubbed floors and did cleaning chores, father cleaned latrines and swept streets, all under close supervision. At times they saw each other from a distance, while being transported to and from work. One day, as she finished scrubbing the floor in an office which was near a building's exit, she walked out while no one was looking and made it safely home. A week later, father was also able to run away and return home, drained of both strength and spirit from the ordeal. We were ever so grateful and happy for being able to be together again.

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Now, back at the detention center where I was being held on the first day of what was to become a five year long captivity, a constant flow of new arrivals filled the room to capacity. There was very little room to move about since the bunk beds occupied most of the space. Toward the end of the day, we had to double up, two in one bed, since there were not enough beds for everyone. That night was a frightening experience. All around us were the sounds of sorrow: sobbing, moaning, groaning. It was so uncomfortable sleeping fully dressed and in the same clothing that we were wearing when the Germans took us away; none of us had brought anything else along. Rose and I spent a restless night cuddled together on a straw pallet which was really just large enough for only one body. We drifted into and out of sleep. I fell asleep and woke and fell asleep, over and over again. Dreams broke into my sleep like intruders; once I came out of it in a fit of shaking. There was a time in my sleep when I found myself running along an echoing passage, vainly searching for a door. Toward four in the morning, I surfaced once more and remained awake, my mind back on the treadmill.

Daylight finally came; we sat up on our bunk bed and looked at each other. What a sorry sight we were. Our eyes were puffed from crying, our clothes were in disarray, and our braids were mingled with straw.

The sun streamed brightly through two huge windows. We looked into the street from the top of our bed, thinking about the uncertainty of what was still to come. Suddenly, we saw a mob of people in the street, converging in our direction. They were running toward the school building, and now they were below our windows which were located about ten feet above the ground. They were our families: mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters. They all came as soon as the night curfew was over. During the night, there were no guards at the barricades, so they took the risk of being there just before the curfew ended so as to be able to come close to the building. Now, in just a few minutes, the street was crowded with a seething human mass. They waved their arms and shouted the names of their daughters and sisters. They cried and lamented. Inside, we responded similarly, and there was much noise and confusion. We climbed, pushed and shoved one another to gain a foothold on the inside window sill, in order to look through the glass and find someone of ours in this maddening crowd; it was a scene of utter heartbreak. We shouted, "Mommy! Daddy!"; we called the names of our sisters and brothers or any aunts and uncles who might have been there. It was sheer bedlam. Finally, when someone from the outside and from the inside did manage to attract each others attention, a tearful scene unfolded. Words of endearment were spoken in voices choked

with tears. "Mommy, Mommy, dear Daddy, please help me. -- We will, we'll try hard, are you OK, dear Malkele?" Then someone else would pull her down from the window sill to get up on it herself, and she would start shouting for her loved ones. This continued for ten to fifteen minutes. Rose and I managed to get up on the window sill twice, but neither of us could spot any of our relatives in the crowd. Then, the girl from my neighborhood noticed my mother in the crowd. She gave me her place at the window, but by the time I scrambled onto the window sill, the guards were already dispersing the people with the butts of their rifles, hitting, nudging, even kicking them. Several shots were fired into the air, and the street was again empty and quiet.

The people lingered in the neighboring streets and at each end of the street where the guards stood. Within a several block radius of the school, were one and two story homes. People climbed onto the roofs of these homes hoping to get a glimpse of their children. On the second day of my incarceration, I recognized my father among the people on one of these roofs; he was waving his arms. I waved back frantically and shouted as loudly as I could "Daddy!, Daddy!" I very much doubt that he was able to see me behind the window's glass and from such a distance. Oh, if only he knew that I saw and recognized him. After a few minutes, he descended from the roof, and that was it; I never saw him again. I lay down on the bunk bed and cried spasmodically.

The only time we left the classroom was when we had to use the bathroom, and even then we had to go in groups. On those occasions, I observed that all entrances were guarded and that there was not the slightest chance to escape.

On the second day, we were marched into the foyer again. We were told to stand in a single line, and then we were paraded in front of long tables at which several men in army uniforms were seated; they were supposedly doctors. Next, we were taken to another classroom on the second floor. The setup here was the same as on the lower level; bunk beds filled with straw, crowded the room.

By now we were dirty and very disheveled. We had worn the same clothing for forty-eight hours without disrobing or washing ourselves. We were only able to clean our hands or face when we went to the bathroom.

As before, Rose and I settled down on an upper bunk bed and prepared for another long and restless night. We reminisced about the happier days with our families, amid outbursts of tears, and this is how we fell asleep. As on the previous night, the same improbable demented nightmare asserted itself. I finally woke up, disoriented. "Where am I, where is this place?", I questioned, and desperately struggled to control myself. "Who are they to decide what becomes of us.

Look, listen to me, I want to speak to someone else, I haven't done anything wrong for you to keep me here." -- these were the words going around in my mind. I pressed my body closer to Rose and slowly quieted down.

Loud knocking woke everyone, as the classroom door was flung open. Several guards entered with many small suitcases and bundles. Calling out names, they flung the packages toward the one who answered. These packages, containing clothing and toiletries, came from the recipients' homes. During that day, most of us received a package. I waited anxiously for mine and it came around noontime. In it were several dresses, underclothes, a pair of winter shoes, a winter coat, a toothbrush, and a few toiletries. How I appreciated those things; they put me in touch with my family again.

That same afternoon, I stood on the window sill looking at the street below, when I noticed the guard being called away from the south side of the street. Instantly, the street became crowded with people. Inside the room, everyone wanted to get up on the window sill. I held onto the window frame, as if my life depended on my staying up there, and wouldn't relinquish my place to others who tried to pull me down. Just then, I saw my mother out there. Her eyes searched as she waved her outstretched hand. I screamed as loudly as I could, "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy!", but so did others. How then would she be able to distinguish my cry from among so many others or find my face in the sea of faces squeezed together at the window on the second floor. I tried frantically to get her attention by shouting "here, look here, here I am!". But no, she did not see me. I saw her drawn, pale, tear stained and so dear face. Soon, so soon, the guard returned and dispersed the crowd. "Get back, get back, Zurueck, zurueck!" they shouted, pushing and hitting with rifles. This was the last time I saw my mother.

Several times during the ensuing days the crowd outside managed, in spurts, to draw close to the school building. Each time the same melee occurred -- inside scrambling for a foothold at the window, outside pushing and shoving to come closer to the building in order to get a better view, and to scream and shout names. On one such occasion, I saw my brother Motek in the throng. I was even able to attract his attention. He tried to tell me something, but I just couldn't make out what he was saying in all the noise and confusion. And then he too was gone with the others, chased away.

If it were not for the curfew, the people outside would never have left the street and the vigil for their children. Between 9 PM and 6 AM the Jewish people were not allowed to be on the streets, and so at curfew time, quiet descended on the street and the surroundings. Inside, Rose and I bedded down again for another restless night. About three o'clock

in the morning, the door was opened with a bang. Guards ordered us to gather our belongings. Several hundred of us congregated in the foyer and were told to form a column of fours.

In the twilight, when the gray divides night from morning, we were ordered to march out into the street and across town. We were a strange caravan of young women, pale faced with fear reflecting in our eyes. Half of us were between the ages of fourteen and eighteen, the rest no older than their mid-twenties. German soldiers with rifles slung over their shoulders marched along both sides of the column. Even though this was the town where I was born and raised, never before was I on these streets at such an ungodly hour. The deafening noise of the soldiers' heavy boots, and the clatter of our shoes reverberated in the morning stillness, while the street lamps cast their pale shadow. There was not another of God's creatures on the streets; we felt forlorn and forsaken, and did not know our destination. We arrived at the train station located in the center of town. A train was waiting for us and we were ordered aboard. Rose and I huddled together on a hard bench in one of the cars, shivering from cold air and fear. When all of us and our guards were on board, the train pulled out of the station, leaving behind some high German officials.

The journey took all day, and our mood shifted wildly. At times, gloomy silence bordering on desperation prevailed. Once I even dozed off into an uneasy short sleep. I was dreaming of faces, and places near and far, all frenetically scrambled together, kaleidoscopic images sweeping over me as if I were drowning. Awakening did not provide any relief. At other times, our youthful exuberance asserted itself. In spite of our predicament, we burst into song as if we were on an excursion, on an outing. Then sensing the journey was almost at an end, we became silent again.

It was a gray evening when we arrived at a town called Trautenau. We were in the Sudetenland, once part of Czechoslovakia, which was now annexed by the Third Reich. At the station, we were met by a group of people -- several men and one woman. The woman, in her fifties, was tall, thin, and very energetic, as was evident by her movements. She later turned out to be a real virago. She was assigned to be our camp commander. We gathered on the station platform and were ordered to form a column of twos. The first ninety of us were marched off. The rest were to form two other camps in the vicinity. It took an hour to get to our destination. We marched in the middle of the road. On either side of the street, there were houses, shops, a church, and people minding their own business. We turned several corners and crossed a tram-clanking street. The crowds thinned out. Twice we bore right. There was less traffic and the road widened; soon we were almost alone. A stream appeared on the left flank of the road and there were

now meadows on either side, dotted with oaks and evergreens. The countryside again widened and became more thickly wooded. Then abruptly the road narrowed and veered to the left. In the distance, we could discern a tall factory chimney surrounded by several buildings. We had arrived in Parschnitz. As we later found out, this vicinity was famous for its many weaving factories. It was no wonder, therefore, that our final destination was a factory in Parschnitz called Walzel; this was where our march ended.

We were lead onto the factory grounds and into a small two story building to the left of the main factory building. There were two long halls on the second floor which had once been used for storage. The lower level was still a viable factory where big bails of flax, fed into huge machines, were torn to pieces, producing the first rough thick strands of flax which were rolled onto huge spools. In the upstairs halls where we were now standing, two-story bunk beds lined both long walls leaving a walkway between. We were each ordered to occupy a bed. On the bed lay loose straw and a military blanket. As we listened to the orders given us by the camp commander and her helpers, we soon realized that their German language was spiced with a heavy colloquial accent, to the degree that many words sounded completely different; it was therefore difficult for us to comprehend what was expected of us, until we became used to their colloquialism.

And so in these dingy and alien surroundings, a new world began for us; but at least we hoped that for the time being, we were not in mortal danger.

## Chapter 4: The Endurance of Hope

We slept miserably, if at all. Eventually, the first nightmare filled night passed. At the sound of a shrill whistle early in the morning, we jumped out of bed and dressed quickly. We were given sacks into which to stuff straw, and from then on the straw bags served as our mattresses. That chore completed, we were assigned to various departments in the factory. Rose and I were very lucky as we later found out. We were given jobs in a comparatively clean and dust free department called "Haspelei". The other departments were terribly noisy, dusty, and dirty from the process of refining raw flax. Our department received spools of wet yarn which we knotted together on a large machine as it turned, thus rolling the yarn into strands which next went to the drying process. Departments were dependant on each other, as with any assembly line. Full spools of yarn delivered to us had to quickly be emptied by us and sent back so that they could again be available, otherwise this production would stop. The work was by no means easy, but others had it much harder. At first these huge machines were overwhelming, the noise deafening, and the dust unbearable. However, in a short time we became very skilled at our jobs.

We worked together with older German women, yet we were not allowed to converse with them. During the many years of our incarceration, we managed to get friendly with a few, and even exchanged words with them. Secretly, some even used to give us food scraps. One woman in particular grew fond of me; once she whispered across to me from her machine to meet her around eight in the evening at the big chimney so that she could bring me something. Needless to say, a little extra food meant a great deal to us. Fifteen minutes before the appointed time, I managed to get out of our building and stealthily crossed to the other side of the factory building, next to the big chimney. By the time I got there, my heart was in my throat from the fear that I felt. I stood with my back flattened to the corner of the wall and my mind shouted: "What if I am caught here where I have no business being, oh God!". Just then I recognized the woman's shadow in the distance. Cautiously she looked around and walked briskly toward me. In one quick motion she pushed a quart sized pot into my hand and disappeared. By then it was almost dark. Pressing the pot to my bosom, I ran as fast as I could back to our quarters where Rose was waiting for me in anticipation. We climbed onto the upper bunk and secretly uncovered the pot. Inside were bits of potatoes and gravy, some vegetables, and a tiny piece of meat, obviously scraps and leftovers from dinner. We had a feast! Next day I secretly returned the pot to the woman and with a grateful smile thanked her for her generosity. From then on, every so often, she dropped off something for me. Sometimes, she would leave it in my basket at the machine, and on other occasions, she would whisper for me to

meet her in some distant corner.

To entice us to work harder, the camp commander one day announced that those who worked best would receive a bonus in the form of bed sheets. Soon many of us had sheets which of course improved our feelings. As far as work was concerned, we had to produce regardless, since we were constantly watched and therefore had no choice in the matter.

Being locked up so far away from home, separated from our loved ones, was almost unbearable. We were so young. The nights were the worst of all. For many months we cried ourselves to sleep.

From the time we arrived here until 1943, we were given the privilege and thus the opportunity to correspond with our families. That is, we were given postal cards to write on, at first weekly, and then less frequently. We also received mail from home. For a short period, we were even allowed to receive packages from home. I remember writing my first few postal cards home, pleading with my parents to rescue me from this place. I didn't realize then how I must have tortured them with these messages since they couldn't possibly have helped me. Then, one day this realization crystallized, and I took stock of my situation. Realizing that I was there to stay, at the mercy of the Germans, until the war ended and if the Germans were defeated, I suddenly grew up, and my style of writing changed. From that point on, my messages were: "I am fine and you needn't worry about me. My only concern is for you. Please take good care of yourselves, so that I may have someone to come home to."

In the mail from home, news had been arriving, between the lines, that it was getting progressively worse there. More and more people were being dragged out of their homes or were being grabbed off the streets - in the same way that dog catchers operate - by cutting off avenues of escape. Each card from home brought news that another member of someone's family was missing.

In one of my earlier cards home, I had mentioned that it was quite cold here. As a result, I received a package from home. In it I found a ski suit, which of course I didn't have any use for, but nonetheless, I was ecstatic to have received it. Among the other things in the package, were my grandmother's long flannel blue and white striped pantaloons, which even she hadn't worn anymore in many years. On discovering this outlandish garment, my face turned bright red, and I quickly hid it so that I would not be ridiculed for it by the other girls. Surprisingly however, these pantaloons served a very unique purpose later on. After parading around in the ski suit for a while, I took it off, put it back cherishingly into the box in which it had come, and slid it under my bed for safekeeping.

On the days when the factory was closed, the camp commander would occasionally choose several girls to accompany her to town, to carry back her acquired packages. The girls would march in the middle of the road with the camp commander alongside. This was the only opportunity for us to see the outside world. It was my luck one day, to be among those chosen for this task. I was in ecstasy and decided to wear my new ski suit. I pulled the box out from under the bed and opened it; out jumped several mice. Screaming, I scrambled onto the upper bunk bed. Somebody rattled the box to see if there were more mice inside. There were none. I climbed down from the bed, took the suit out of the box, and looked it over. There were two large holes which the mice had nibbled in it - one on the upper sleeve and the other in the front. I felt sick and very sad. I wanted to patch the holes which were quite large, but I didn't have anything available; so I sewed it up as best as I possibly could.

Several months passed; one day the camp commander announced to us that we would be getting company, new arrivals. A transport of new girls was coming. There were enough empty beds around, and now they would be occupied. We anticipated the new arrivals with mixed emotions; we were sorry for their predicament, yet at the same time we were eager for real and first hand news from the outside world.

They arrived and were as young as we; the news they brought was not good. They told of the horrible situation existing in the ghettos, of the hunger, of the separation of families, of sickness, and of death. We knew much of this before, but to hear of it first hand made us feel desolate and inconsolable for quite a long while, until things again assumed a certain routine.

In one of those transports, I remember the arrival of a young woman whose name was Lilka. I don't know with certainty Lilka's age; at the time, I could only estimate her to be between 20 and 25. She had blond hair and was strikingly beautiful. Her blue eyes had the power to transport you, leaving you in a trance, especially when she was singing. You see, Lilka had been a singer as well as a dancer in a nightclub in her native town of Krakow, Poland. Here, she found herself completely out of step with her past. Often, in the evening, Lilka would sing and dance for us, her body movements reflecting the sensuousness of the song. One song remains etched in my memory of Lilka and her seductiveness. She sang of a young man, Jimmie, who was in love with her, advising him to get her out of his head, since there also was Ralph, John, and Bob, who took such good care of her, lavishing gifts on her of boats, cars, and villas in Santa Fe. This Polish song, with Lilka's mesmerizing performance, begins, "Wzrost 6 stup, rudy lep, a lapa kazda tak jak cep. W pysku faja, z faji dym, to wszysko razem zwie sie Jim. A oczy mazace, zbyt naiwnie

patzace na swiat a w bokserskej zastrzece, usta male dzieciece wiek 20 lat.  A John uprawial ze mna box, Bob fundowal mi odox, Ralph dbal o mnie tak jak maz, a Ty tylko wzdychaz wciaz o Jimmie."  She transported us with her song into a realm completely unknown to us.  .....  She took sick and was shipped out .....

## Chapter 5: Molly is Pregnant

Molly is one of the girls from the first transport; she has been in camp with us since its inception. We noticed that she was getting peculiarly round as time went on. Although we weren't actually suffering from terrible hunger in the first few months, there wasn't enough food to grow fat, the way Molly was getting to be. Our food was provided by the same kitchen that prepared meals for the German workers, except that our food was not of the same quality or quantity. This arrangement was due to the lack of kitchen facilities in the part of the factory building which we occupied. Eventually a kitchen was built to serve us, and that's when our real troubles began.

Meanwhile, we teased Molly about her secret food supply which fed her so well. Even Molly's younger sister remarked on how well Molly looked.

Several times each week during the evening hours, in preparation for the next day's meal, the German kitchen steamed large kettles full of potatoes. Many times, the cook left orders to have these steamed potatoes peeled. On these occasions, after our day's work, the camp commander would come into one of the halls, point randomly to several of the girls, and say: "you, you, you and you are going with me up to the kitchen to peel potatoes". Of course, this we considered very lucky since secretly, while peeling the potatoes, we literally stuffed ourselves. We ate and ate; we even put some in our bosoms and anywhere we had a pocket, to have some for later. Most of the time we ended up with an upset stomach, but what was an upset stomach - vis-a-vis a satisfied feeling of fullness.

On one of these occasions, Molly was among the girls chosen to peel potatoes. Returning to camp, she handed her sister several potatoes which she had concealed and then went to lay down on her bed. In a few minutes however, Molly was running toward the bathroom where she vomited violently. She gave back the potatoes she had eaten, and more. She went on vomiting until she couldn't any more; then she grasped her stomach with both hands to steady the violence which shook her body. At this point, it became evident to us who were watching Molly, that something was the matter. However, we dared not make a statement or an accusation.

Weeks passed and Molly's girth grew larger. Then on one of our weekly excursions for a bath, things became apparent. We lined up and marched half a mile to the factory's dye and bleach plant. Inside the plant, there were huge kettles formed in the shape of a bundt pan, reaching from floor level deep into the ground. About fifteen girls descended via ladder into each kettle, and enough water was pumped in to allow us to wash ourselves.

Molly reluctantly undressed and descended with us into the kettle. Her belly resembled a large melon; her breasts were puffed up and the area around her nipples was large, round, and brown. Those of us who were still naive teenagers did not know what to make of it, but the older women immediately knew that Molly was pregnant.

While we were bathing, the camp commander came to check each kettle to make sure we were all still there. When she stopped at our kettle, she looked down, and seeing Molly in the nude, she cried out, "Molly! You are pregnant!". Of course, Molly immediately denied this and even succeeded in convincing the commander that she was not pregnant.

In the ensuing months, the girls in the camp continually speculated on who had made Molly pregnant. After all, Molly and her sister came from a very religious background, and were raised by very pious parents in accordance with strict orthodox Jewish law. For Molly, her pregnancy was considered a terrible disgrace, but here in camp there were no parents, there wasn't even a society, hence there were no rules. No one ever discovered who the man behind this tragedy was.

For the duration of her pregnancy, Molly tried to camouflage her corpulent body in loose fitting dresses and aprons. We who knew, tried to help her whenever necessary, shielding her protruding stomach by standing in front of her. Molly therefore did not walk alone again until the time of her delivery. The camp commander was red-faced when she drove Molly to the hospital for the delivery. She couldn't explain how a Jewish girl went undetected through a nine month pregnancy, in her camp. She would not divulge that at one point she had suspected pregnancy and had not done anything about it. Molly gave birth to a baby girl; both mother and baby fell prey to the Nazis, for they were shipped out of camp.

## Chapter 6: Hunger

A time finally came, when a kitchen was installed in our camp in a cubicle partitioned off between the two halls. This area now served as the kitchen and dining room. A cook and helper were appointed from among the adult women, and with that, food stopped being delivered from the German kitchen.

Soon there was less food, and we were constantly hungry. The bread ration was a quarter of a loaf per person biweekly. In the morning we received black ersatz coffee and a teaspoon of marmalade; lunch was a watery soup and a potato. Soup, potato, and a small hamburger or some horsemeat in the soup, was the evening meal. The ration of bread was not enough and most of the girls had nothing left after a day or two; thereafter, we suffered terribly from hunger. Each of us tried different ways to manage our rations in order to stretch them out and make them last. For instance, Rose and I took our bread together, thus making each ration half a loaf. This way it was easier to slice the bread paper thin; together we disciplined ourselves to ration our bread so that we would have some available for each day. This was no easy task. To stretch the thin slices of bread, together we saved one potato from our lunch or dinner. Then we sliced the potato thinly and put it between two bread slices to make a thicker sandwich for the next day. Potato and bread sandwiches became very popular in camp. We daydreamed about them and hoped that one day when we got out of here, we would get enough potato and bread sandwiches.

Frequently, in the evening when we were already in bed, and our hunger was too strong, one of us would suggest: "let's eat tomorrow's breakfast"; the other might respond: "we'll eat one of the sandwiches, and tomorrow we will share the other". Sometimes we did just that, but sometimes sharing one thin sandwich just wasn't enough, our hunger wasn't satisfied; so we divided our other sandwich as well. Unfortunately, the next day we paid the penalty of not eating any substantial food until lunch time, and by then we were ravenously hungry.

At one point in the Fall of our second year in camp, we received a short respite from hunger. On one crisp Fall Sunday, the factory closed and a few of us were walking in the yard, taking in some fresh air which we did not get all week. One of the girls ventured beyond the fence surrounding the factory. There, she found a great mound of black soil neatly piled. She climbed back over the fence and reported, "I think I've found a potato mound". Potatoes are stored for the winter and can be stored for several years as long as they are hermetically sealed with saw dust and a covering of soil. However, as soon as an opening is made in the seal allowing air to get in, the potatoes must

be used up quickly, otherwise they will rot.

That same evening, under the cover of darkness, several girls reached the mound and dug a hole in it, where indeed they found potatoes. They returned with armfuls of potatoes. The news spread like wildfire among the camp's inmates. Fortunately, we had the sense not to go in bunches, otherwise we would have been caught and it would have meant the end of a good thing. We arranged it so that approximately every half hour, two girls left the camp for a chance to get some potatoes.

Rose and I were scheduled to go around ten in the evening. Suddenly I remembered my grandmother's pantaloons that I had received in a package from home; they could come in handy now. Shortly before it was time for us to go, I slipped on this outlandish garment, tied each leg below my knee with a rope, and Rose and I left. We ran stooped in the darkness, over the fence and to the mound. By exploring with our hands and tripping over scattered potatoes, we found the opening. We wasted no time, stuffing potatoes into our pockets and any place else we could find on ourselves. We were trying to bring back as many potatoes as possible. I filled my pantaloons to the point that I was still able to walk, but with my legs spread wide apart. After stuffing every available space, we filled our arms and started back to camp. Half way, we suddenly heard footsteps in the distance, and soon saw a beam of light from a flashlight. As if by command, we hit the ground and stayed there as flat as we could, afraid that whoever it was would spot us, or could hear the pounding of our hearts. It turned out to be the watchman and he passed without noticing us. Again we got up and started running toward the camp. Just then, the ropes which bound my pantaloons came undone, and the potatoes went flying from under my dress. In spite of the seriousness of the situation, I could not help visualizing the comical figure I must have portrayed at this moment - me in long pantaloons out of which potatoes were falling. I started to choke with laughter and Rose joined in with me. I groped for a few of the scattered potatoes, but after a moment we decided to continue back to camp. As a result of my misfortune with the pantaloons, our potato haul wasn't especially substantial. Between us, we counted about twenty potatoes; these we concealed under our straw sacks, as others had done, and soon everyone had potatoes under their sacks. After a day or two, the potatoes started to sprout, and soon a foul odor permeated our quarters.

It is necessary to explain what we did with these potatoes, so that at least for a fortnight, we were able to satisfy our hunger.

There was no heating system in our camp; instead, in the middle of each hall stood a pipe stove the size of an oil drum, with a removable lid. At the top of the drum, on

either side, there were two handles positioned so that a long round wooden bar could be slid through, allowing two or sometimes four of us to carry it with the wooden bar resting on our shoulders. The drum also had a round hole about three inches from the bottom. The stove came with two solid pieces of round wood, the diameter of a stove pipe. One piece was about a foot and a half long and was inserted horizontally into the lower hole. The second piece was the height of the drum and was inserted vertically into the middle of the drum after the lid was removed. Both solid round pieces of wood met near the bottom, creating a right angle funnel-like shape. With the two solid pieces of wood in place, the drum was carried into that section of the factory, beneath our living quarters, where flax was being put through the first stage of work. Scraps remaining from this process were shoveled into the drum, while two people held the two pieces of wood in place. Filling the drum took about an hour because the scraps were also systematically stomped down by one person, who climbed into the drum. Scraps were shoveled in and stomped down until the compacted material reached the top. After this was done, the wood pieces were withdrawn, leaving a right angle open funnel. The top was replaced; the drum was then carried back to the hall where it was placed on a low round stand. The material in the drum was then ignited with a match, through the hole near the bottom of the drum. It burned from within, creating warmth around the drum, while the top grew red hot. The more solidly the drum was packed, the longer it burned.

Upon our arrival in camp, each of us had been given a black one-quart pot. In this pot we received our daily food; from this pot we ate since there were no plates in camp. Now this pot suddenly came in very handy. Stolen potatoes, some water, a crust of bread for color, and a pinch of salt, made a mighty good hot pot of soup!

There was enough room for about ten pots at one time on the surface of the stove, while each of us stood around it cooking our own soup. What a wonderful warm feeling it was to be able to go to sleep on a full stomach. But, we had to be very careful not to let the Germans catch us. Therefore, one of us always stood guard at the door, ready with the password to warn us of danger. At those times, we grabbed the hot pots and shoved them under our beds.

Our "well-being" was short lived - the smell of spoiled and sprouting potatoes gave us away. One day the camp commander, entering the hall, made a sudden stop; she sniffed and sniffed again, and then roared, "it stinks in here". Mad with anger, she started pulling covers off the bunk beds, and finally lifting the straw sacks, she found the potatoes. We responded mutely to her inquiries of where these potatoes came from, and this made her absolutely furious. She cornered one girl, grabbed her by the hair, and forced her to tell where she got the potatoes. The

commander's face grew white as she unloaded her fury, slapping the girl across the face; then she turned to us and told us of the consequences we would have to bear for what we had done. For us however, the worst was that the potatoes would be removed from their hiding places and would be confiscated.

The lack of hygiene was a problem from which we each suffered. Toothbrushes from home were worn down to the handles; no bristles were left; there were no new toothbrushes to be had. Toothpaste did not exist.

A few months after our arrival in camp, we became aware of a problem which frightened us immensely. Except for a handful of girls, the rest of us had stopped menstruating. We guessed that perhaps the Germans were feeding us something to prevent us from menstruating, or that the constant anxiety and change in living patterns had precipitated this condition. It remained for the entire length of our incarceration that most of us no longer menstruated.

The poor diet, bad hygienic conditions, and irregularity in our life cycle, caused many of us to be inflicted with carbuncles and furuncles which covered many parts of our bodies and was very painful. Many of us had lice infested heads, causing itching; scratching, eventually brought infection to the entire head surface, which would then ooze with puss, making it necessary to shave the head.

Rose and I had cut off our braids shortly after we arrived in camp, when we realized how hard it would be to keep ourselves clean. Through constant vigilance, we succeeded in keeping our heads clean and free of lice. Each of us succumbed to several carbuncles, which were terribly painful, until they ripened, drained, and healed.

At the end of our hall was a small room with six beds set aside for the sick, and on one of the walls was a shelf containing some bandages, iodine, aspirins, a few tubes of ointment, tweezers, and a syringe. Since the time when I had suffered from carbuncles and used to frequent the sick room for ichtol ointment and dressings, I began helping out and assisting the nurse in her chores. The nurse in attendance was one of our own girls who had no formal training in the profession, but had been lucky enough to have been chosen for the post. Because of my extra work in the sick room, the nurse gave orders to the kitchen staff for me to occasionally receive a little extra food at dinner time, which I in turn shared with Rose.

Within a quarter mile of our factory, was a French prisoner of war camp. Several of these prisoners worked in our factory. Emma, our "Jewish Eldest", who was appointed by the Germans to represent us and to keep order in our camp,

had a boyfriend among the Frenchmen. His name was Marcel, and he worked in my department. His job consisted of pushing a heavy steel cart, unloading from it trays with full spools, and taking the empty spools back with him. Every so often, when Marcel handed me a tray, he would whisper in his broken German, "tell Emma to meet me tonight in the courtyard". Sometimes I would find a small piece of chocolate among the spools, as a reward for passing this information. Why Marcel chose to communicate with Emma through me, I will never know. We were absolutely forbidden to speak to or to be in touch with any of the prisoners of war.

In the courtyard below our camp windows were storage bins. The Frenchmen went there when in need of something for their camp, and pretending to be searching for something, they spent time with our girls.

Frequently, on Sundays when the factory was shut down, and we were all in our place attending to our own needs, someone looking out the window would spot these Frenchmen as they entered the courtyard. Their presence would be announced in a loud voice: "the Frenchmen are here", and momentarily everyone would run to the windows to look. We were able to identify them by their first names because we knew them from work and because we knew who carried on a love affair with whom. These liaisons almost exclusively involved girls from the administration; this arrangement caused a certain amount of resentment in camp. Some of the women felt the lack of a sexual outlet more than others; however, because they did not hold an appointed position such as Emma or the nurse, they wouldn't dare take the kind of risk that women from the so called "administration" did. These women articulated their grievances loudly and openly by saying "what do you think that these coquets are, but a bunch of whores and prostitutes". One woman in particular derived immense pleasure from spying on the couples during their courtship. She found a vantage point at one of the windows where she could observe exactly what was going on in the courtyard below, and she loudly reported to us every detail, as in the manner of a sports announcer. Meanwhile, she was teased by others, who said that she would probably not mind changing places and being down there instead of playing the role of onlooker.

As may be expected of any large group of people, we were a conglomeration of many types. Some of us were educated and some were not. Some had a nice disposition and others were constantly grouchy. There were those who always extended a hand to someone else, and also those who were always willing and ready to take. There were song writers, poets, comedians, and simple story tellers. We had extroverts and introverts and plain ordinary people. One girl in particular comes to mind -- Mitzie. Poor soul, she had the worst job in camp, and was the scapegoat of many a joke.

Mitzie -- in her early twenties, slim and with dark hair, quite attractive but not too bright. She seldom spoke to anyone and kept very much to herself. There were many departments in our factory; they were named Hecklerei, Vorspinnerei, Feinsal, Haspelei, Veberei, and Bleicherei. The department in which Mitzie worked was the Hecklerei; it was on the ground floor and the dirtiest in the entire factory. It had huge machines with fork-like arms which tore flax into pieces and wound them into the first dry thick strands. This process yielded an immense amount of dust so that one could hardly separate out a worker in there from the flax. The face, hair, eyebrows, clothes, in fact the whole person was entirely covered in flax dust.

After working in this same department for two years, Mitzie developed permanently reddened cheeks and a chronic cough. It was said in camp that Mitzie had developed tuberculosis. The machine at which Mitzie worked, frequently jammed, perhaps because it was overloaded. On one of these occasions, Mitzie was on the top of the machine, and while pulling, trying to unclog it, she slipped and fell with her legs spread onto a protruding piece of metal; this halted her fall but gave her much discomfort for a while so that she could hardly walk. Of course this was immediately picked up by a few loud-mouths and spread all over camp, as the piquant story of how Mitzie lost her innocence to a machine.

In our daily existence, our mood changed with what meager news we were able to receive from the outside world. When the news was favorable, our hopes soared, and in the evenings we sat around and sang songs -- songs of yesteryear, songs our families used to sing in Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, and German. Soon nostalgia would overtake us. Some of us wept, some of us laughed, others continued to reminisce until it was time to go to sleep.

One night after such a nostalgic evening, when everyone was already sound asleep, the camp commander accompanied by the watchman burst into the camp, shouting: "everyone stay in your bed!". Energetically, and in an agitated state of mind, she walked from bunk bed to bunk bed, checking us and counting us. This accomplished, fuming in anger, she announced that two girls had tried to escape but had been caught; at present they were being detained by the local police and would be brought back to camp tomorrow. The rest of the night was not for sleep, as we speculated on how they had escaped and how they had been caught.

In the morning, the camp commander brought the pair of fugitives back. It became known that after they had managed to get out of the camp, they had walked toward the town, Trautenau. There they decided to go to the train station and to purchase two tickets. At the ticket window they were asked for identification cards, which of course they did not

have, and so they were immediately apprehended by the police.

Now, standing here among us, they were terribly pale, swaying from fatigue and the fear of what was yet to come. As it turned out, they were extremely lucky in their punishment -- they were only given a more difficult job to do than they had previously been doing.

## Chapter 7: Getting Sick Is Hazardous

When we first arrived in camp, anyone who became ill was sent back home. It was therefore understandable that we all hoped to become sick. Of course the illness had to be no ordinary cold or flu, but rather something serious enough to require prolonged bed rest or hospitalization since our camp was not equipped to handle these kinds of situations. This was our only means of returning home, and thus this thought was uppermost in our minds. Only a few were lucky enough to come down with an ailment which the camp could not handle, and consequently they were shipped out of camp -- home. We were later to find out that they were not lucky after all, since they were either shipped to some camp far worse than ours, or they were annihilated altogether.

About six to eight months after our arrival, an arrangement was made with a nearby camp called Haase, to use their infirmary in case of need. Their infirmary was not larger than ours since it had as few beds as ours; however, they had a medical doctor in attendance with his permanent quarters there. There were about five other camps in the vicinity, and the doctor made weekly visits to all of them.

At the start of my second winter in camp, I began feeling badly. My legs and especially my feet hurt terribly. I was also suffering from bad migraine headaches. I complained to the nurse and the camp commander, but the only way for me not to be required to go to work and be allowed to remain in bed, was for me to have a fever; unfortunately, this was not the case, so I had to go to work.

The nature of my work required me to be on my feet at my machine, running back and forth all the time, and I suffered terribly. This went on for weeks until I thought I could no longer continue. I slowed down, and thus so did my output; consequently, the machine in the next department which was dependent on me to provide it with empty spools, slowed down as well. The inspector overseer, a little man with beady eyes and a fearsome disposition, came over to my machine, shouting at me in order to make me speed up my work. "You lazy Jew!", he shouted, waving his fists at me. "Here is no place to be lazy; here you must work or we will be done with you. Get moving but schnell!" All my explanations fell on deaf ears.

One morning with great effort I again managed to drag myself out of bed and went to work with all the others, but at work my feet would no longer hold me up. I ached all over. Not caring about anything anymore, I slumped into the round basket which stood next to each machine, and into which the machine operator used to put her personal belongings and the heavy leather apron which each of us wore. I sat resembling a hen on eggs, and I shivered. A fever had set in. After a while, they led me back to camp where it was indeed my luck

to find the doctor on his weekly visit. While the doctor examined me, my fever rose rapidly. He soon arrived at the diagnosis that I was suffering from rheumatic fever. There were no empty beds in the sickroom, therefore they laid me down on my own bed. When evening came and the girls returned from work, I was delirious with a very high fever.

By next morning, my fever had dropped somewhat. I was dressed and put on a child's sleigh since the ground outside was covered with a fresh blanket of snow. One girl pulled the sleigh; accompanied by the camp commander, I was thus escorted to the infirmary at Haase camp. I stayed there for two weeks; during this time I was given several aspirins daily and two rolls of elastic bandages with which to bandage my legs. This was the extent of my medical treatment.

It was my good fortune to be in the infirmary with the sister of the cook of Haase camp. We became well acquainted and because of this acquaintance, I received plenty of food during my stay in the infirmary.

At the end of the two week period, I was returned to my camp. When I finally started to walk again, my legs felt as though I had been bedridden for months. The camp commander allowed me to stay off work for another week, though in this time I had to perform various chores at the camp. I was far from well when I finally had to return to work; yet since I knew that I had to, I forced myself to work. My recovery was a hard, arduously long process. The illness had left me with problems which I had to conceal, otherwise I would have been shipped out. By this time we knew that to be shipped out meant certain death -- it meant being sent to an extermination facility.

## Chapter 8: News and Inspiration

Our day to day existence revolved greatly around the sparse news received from the outside world. One source of news was the tiny trickle of mail which we received from home. At that time, if a letter was mailed from home, we still received it. However, there were fewer of our people left in our hometowns to write us. They had either been shipped out or been killed. Our mail was censored. We knew this and our families had found out as well. Thus the letters that did arrive told us in a concealed way of the horrors which had been perpetrated against our people in the ghettos. They revealed to us what had happened to some of our loved ones. Here are illustrations of news between the lines. "Dear Celia, Dad went to see Uncle Ben." In reality, Uncle Ben had died before the war. "Lee does not like to stay home anymore, so he went to visit with a friend; that rascal, he must like it there, because we haven't heard from him anymore." That meant Lee had been taken away and they didn't know where he was. Or, "Do you remember the Bermans down the street, we used to visit them so frequently. Now we just see them once in a great while." This refered to Berman's bakery, and the fact that there was little bread to be had.

We shared each bit of news with one another, and in that way we were able to put together a pretty accurate picture of what was going on back in our hometowns. Our mood was desperate, our outlook was gloomy, but not for a moment did we give up hope.

We used to cry a lot, but we also used to laugh when we got together in the evenings or on the weekends and told stories of life at home. We composed songs of sorrow and poems that expressed our feelings.

One poem in particular, written in Yiddish by one of the girls, went: "I don't want to, I don't want to be enslaved and tormented. I don't want to constantly, constantly be harassed. I don't want to eat dirt and dust. From the machine noise I am already deaf. I don't want to spit gall and blood. I want back to my home. Night after night I lay with my eyes open and I think, and suddenly I see her, my mother. I stretch out my arms -- I pull her to me with all of my might. I kiss her gray hair -- Huh! Huh! Huh! You big fool, this isn't true. Your mother is not here! Your mother they dragged out into the big, dark world, into the cold! What is now left for me in my own home? -- left alone, alone as a stone."

I remember most vividly the loneliness that we felt, especially we, the younger ones. We had an air of child like innocence and knew nothing of the stuff of youthful glory, like dating, staying out after hours, being in love with movie stars, and so on. We had a hard time maintaining

our identity, and we had to try to muster all of our courage. But where would we find it, we asked -- how is it measured?

We were lucky enough to have had available another source of information. A Czechoslovakian man who worked in the factory's smithy, supplied us with current news. When he passed near us, or when he came to fix a broken machine, he dropped tidbits such as, "the allies are advancing", or "the Russians crossed a particular line", or "the Germans have taken a beating somewhere". We nicknamed him "Uncle". He never passed up an opportunity to squeeze into our hands a crumb of bread. Throughout the entire time of our incarceration, this man was a source of help and strength, beyond belief. He constantly endangered himself through his attitude and his deeds; in the act of helping us, he often came close to being caught, yet he never relinquished this self-imposed duty. In subsequent years, when life for us grew much harder, Uncle secretly made gadgets out of tin in the factory shop and on weekends peddled them to the farmers in exchange for potatoes, so that he could give them to us. He also saw us receive our meager lunch soup in pots which did not have covers; as a result, the soup was cold before we even had a chance to sit down and eat it. Again, "Uncle" took it upon himself to supply us with tin covers which he secretly made up in the same factory shop. Soon most of us had a lid for our pot. The Germans couldn't figure out where these covers came from, and we didn't say.

By his kindness and his deeds, indeed through the example he set, "Uncle" became for us our source of hope, of courage, and of strength.

With us in camp, we also had in our midst a "Rebbitzen", a Rabbi's wife. She was a slightly built woman, very refined and very pious. She became a tremendous source of inspiration and help to us. Because of her, we were able to know on which day Jewish holidays fell; we obviously did not have a Jewish calendar. With her help, we were also able to observe and to celebrate as many holidays as possible, such as "Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur" -- the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement. On those occasions, she gathered us around her, and we prayed together in unison.

## Chapter 9: Inspection and Selection

One Sunday afternoon, the camp commander asked for volunteers to clean up an empty hall which bordered our two halls, but which had been locked until now. After she got her volunteers, she unlocked the door to the hall. She then gave orders for the walls to be dusted and the floor to be washed clean. Afterward, the volunteers hauled in several long tables and a half dozen chairs. Not knowing why all these preparations had been made, caused us to speculate that perhaps a new transport of women would soon arrive. We could not guess when or from where, and thus the ensuing night was a restless one for us.

In the morning we dressed as usual and went to work, still not able to figure out what would happen. It was nearly eleven AM when through the factory windows, we saw two military cars drive up to the front of the camp building. Out stepped six men in full military regalia, and they were received by the camp commander.

A half hour later, the camp commander and the Jewish eldest came to the factory; walking from one department to another, they told us to immediately stop working and to gather in front of the factory. Outside, we were lined up in a column, two abreast; we marched into the camp with the camp commander leading the way.

We walked up the stairs toward the hall which was cleaned yesterday. The doors stood wide open. Inside was the military entourage; several of these men were sitting behind the two long tables. One officer was standing at the door and one in front of the tables, at a place where white chalk marked a circle on the floor. At this point we were told to completely undress and to form a single line. The hall resonated with their voices which echoed off the bare walls. We were scared, scared and irresolute, and felt that this bordered on being a real nightmare.

Completely bewildered, we undressed and shivering, we formed our clothes into bundles on the floor next to where we stood. Each of us was now completely naked. Some stood shielding their breasts with one hand while the other hand covered their pubic area; some hugged themselves with their arms crossed to shield both breasts. Others moved very close together in order to mutually cover their nakedness -- in order to derive some strength from one another since at that point we each felt so utterly helpless, ashamed, and forsaken.

We were instructed to walk up to the tables, one at a time, and to give our name and age to the men sitting behind the tables who recorded everything in their ledgers. Then we were to step into the chalked off circle and turn around several times. After being looked over and closely

scrutinized, we were to be given a small round paper medallion on which a number was printed. Henceforth, this would be our identification mark.

When my turn came, I approached the table, my mouth dry. I faced him, across the table. The German's ruddy complexion seemed to emphasize his cold steel blue eyes, narrow nose, straight hair; his hat had left a pressure-weal angled across his forehead and he rubbed it gingerly. He paused a moment, stubbing his cigarette in the glass tray. He motioned for me to turn twice as I desperately tried to control my shaking; I don't know how I made my way back to the other girls, clutching the medallion in my hand.

After we received our number, we were permitted to dress and return to work. The whole procedure was terribly frightening and most humiliating. The Germans laughed and carried on a humorous dialogue the entire time. We not only felt ashamed, we also felt like cattle being sized up for slaughter; and indeed, slaughter it was. As we later discovered, there were some women who did not receive a number. They were sent away -- where, we didn't know, but being sure of their end result, we didn't speculate on it. Understandably, morale plunged after this encounter, until favorable news again enabled us to distance ourselves from this degrading experience.

## Chapter 10: Sisters

The idea of sabotage came to mind often, but eventually we reached the conclusion that this was not the place to commit sabotage since our work had no military connection and thus the Germans could not derive any strategic advantage from it. Accordingly, our daily routine continued at its normal pace. The Germans tried to encourage better production by giving us bonuses, like bed sheets or our own fork and spoon.

One day, the camp commander proposed to us that any inmate who could establish a good working record would be allowed to submit to the camp administration the name of a sister at home. The camp administration would then try to bring that sister here to our camp to give her employment. You can imagine our first response to this absurd proposition. Who would willingly deliver another family member into German captivity? However, with the passage of time, as mail from home grew scarcer, with the systematic liquidation of the Jewish population, we began to find merit in the commander's proposal. We reasoned that two family members together would have a better chance to survive than each would have alone. I was one of those who requested that her sister be brought to our camp. I did this with much dread and great reservations, primarily because this would leave my parents all alone. In the last letter from home, I had received the sad news that the Germans had taken Motek, and my parents had not heard from him since. Only my sister Drezl and my parents remained. My decision to request my sister was in part based on the high probability that eventually she would also be taken away.

Having entered Drezl's name on the list, I tried to rationalize this crazy deed; I told myself that all the Germans wanted was to increase production and that this sister gimmick was just a ploy to make us work harder -- they weren't really going to bring anyone's sister here. However, in the remote event that the administration did decide to go through with it, I wrote home so that it would not come as a surprise to my family.

As the days and months passed, we no longer thought about the proposal to bring family members here. One day the camp commander surprised us with the announcement that a group of our sisters would soon be arriving. There is no way I can describe the emotions, the excitement we felt, to actually be reunited with a family member after such a long separation. And one day, after we had returned from work and had received our evening meal ration, several girls confirmed, that through factory windows they had observed a new group of women marching onto the camp grounds and being ushered into the building. With that, we went to the camp commander and deluged her with questions, until she finally admitted to us that our sisters had indeed arrived and were

at present being held in the hall across the stairway. However, she continued, we would not be allowed in there until they were all processed by the camp staff. I could feel nothing but the monstrous hammer blows of my pulse. There was nothing that could restrain us. En masse, we surged through the hallway and across the stairway to the locked door, calling our sisters' names. We pressed against the door until the lock gave way; the door burst wide open and we shoved one another through. Inside we found women looking like forlorn creatures, sitting on bunk beds. I ran feverishly between bunk beds, looking into each face and calling Drezl's name. I had hastily passed the third or fourth bed, when I suddenly realized that I had just passed my own sister and looked into her face without recognizing her. This happened to both of us at the same moment. I whirled around and ran back to her as she stretched her arms out toward me. We locked in a tight embrace and cried as we had never cried before. She took my face into her hands and kissed all of it, as I did hers. All around us, this same scene was being repeated. When I finally had the chance to look Drezl over, I was struck by the grayish pallor of her face and her haggard appearance. She was the oldest child in our family; since I last saw her, she had aged far beyond her years. I asked about mom and dad, and she replied, "if we don't do something soon to bring mother to be with us here, we will no longer have a mother". A chill spread through me changing suddenly to fear, and then silence and heartbreak closed in. "You are asking for the impossible." Drezl believed that because I had managed to bring her here, that I could do the same for our mother. I tried to explain that she was here because of a miracle, one that could not be repeated at will. I could no more prevail upon them to bring my mother here, than I could tell the allies to hurry up and end this war. Being powerless to help my own mother, inflicted a wound in me that would fester long after I had already learned that she was no longer among the living.

That evening, even the camp commander showed us compassion by not imposing the bedtime curfew. We sat on the bed for hours talking, and the more we talked the more horrified we became. Drezl recounted tales of horror, of acts perpetrated by the Germans against the Jews, of how death and violence were commonplace in the ghetto. Describing the hardships our family had endured, she spoke of the first compulsory gathering held, before they were forced into the ghetto on the outskirts of town.

The Germans had issued a decree that on a given Monday, the entire Jewish population without exception was to gather on the soccer field near the railroad tracks, for the purpose of receiving new registration cards. Placards were posted in the streets and on the walls of houses for everyone to read, explaining that those who failed to appear for an identification card, would no longer be able to obtain a

food card, and if caught in the street without the new ID, would be severely dealt with. Naturally people were fearful of the gathering, but they had no choice in the matter, they could not exist without food cards. Drezl, Motek, and our parents conferred to plan what our grandmother should do -- whether or not she should go with them to the gathering. They finally decided that she should not go since she hardly ever left home and therefore would not need an identification card. As for her food, they would all just have to make do with less.

Monday. People began crowding the streets in the early morning hours, everyone going in the direction of the soccer field -- old and young, couples with babies in carriages, sick and healthy, entire families. They went early to get it over with and to be able to return home quickly. The soccer field steadily filled up as more people arrived; no one left. By late afternoon, most people had arrived, a crowd estimated at almost 40,000. Suddenly, German soldiers cordoned off the area so that no one could leave; the ordeal had begun.

Cattle car trains were driven onto the railroad tracks alongside the soccer field and a selection process was started. The Germans most assuredly managed to fool the Jewish population of an entire city. This was not a matter of registration, it was a way of diminishing the Jewish population, of slowly and most systematically annihilating them. When the town's people realized what was actually happening, it was already too late, there wasn't a thing they could do.

The selection proceeded slowly at first. The German military high command stationed themselves on the side of the field by the railroad. As people passed among the SS, they were directed either to the left or to the right. One side meant that they could return home to temporary safety; on the other side, people were ushered into the waiting cattle cars which quickly filled beyond capacity; as was later revealed, they were then shipped out to the infamous death camp, Auschwitz. The drama taking place here in the field was tragic and unbelievable. Families were often literally torn apart by the selection. When parents and children were told to go in different directions, if family members did not obey, the Germans would brutally tear them apart. By evening, one train had been filled and it departed on its journey. While they were waiting for the next train to arrive, our family went through the selection process. Drezl and Motek were permitted to go free, but not mother and father; they were to be shipped out. Drezl and Motek were completely powerless to help them. They watched as our parents were pushed into the throng of people awaiting the arrival of the second train. After a while, my parents realized that this was their last opportunity to save themselves. The Germans had placed powerful light

reflectors around the field, yet somehow, miraculously, a few people taking the risk were able to steal away from the crowd and get home safely; among them were our parents. The selection continued all through the night and into the next day. When it was all over, the Germans had disposed of at least a fourth of the town's Jews, mostly the elderly and the infirm.

Subsequently, the Germans decreed that all remaining Jews would relocate to a ghetto far away in a poor and dilapidated Aryan section on the outskirts of the city. The Aryan population in that section would then occupy the housing left behind by the Jews, after the Jews moved into their ghetto. On the surface, this might seem to have been an even exchange, but in reality it was not. The Jewish people had to leave most of their belongings behind and took with them only what they could carry. In the ghetto, often many families had to share a small apartment. A fence was erected around the ghetto; people were not free to come and go as they pleased. They were only allowed to leave the ghetto when they went to their newly assigned jobs, and then they had to walk in columns and in the middle of the street, accompanied by German soldiers. By then, the yellow Star of David had replaced the armband. According to new regulations, a Jew had to wear a yellow star over the heart and another opposite the first one on the back, in order to be easily recognized. Anyone caught outside the ghetto without permission was severely punished and possibly sent to a concentration camp or just shot to death, all at the whim of his captor. Inside the ghetto, the Germans had a system to deal with the "Jewish problem". Periodically they would cordon off an area of several streets and surround them with a detachment of troops. Then they went door to door collecting people who were carted off to a concentration camp or to an extermination camp. Thus, it became vital for ghetto inhabitants to find or build for themselves a hiding place. Every time the people sensed that what was dubbed as a "catching party" was in the making, they scurried into their hiding places and stayed there until it was safe to come out again. But, the Germans had the upper hand, for how far could a Jew go, or how good a hiding place could he have, when the hiding place was still in the ghetto. No matter what, sooner or later the Germans would get their prey.

My family's hiding place was in the cellar of the house in which they lived; they shared this hiding place as well as their living quarters with three other families. The cellar, which the builder had never finished, was just an excavated area with two small windows to the outside and a dirt floor. The entrance hallway floor wasn't finished either. In one corner of the hallway was an opening with a ladder extending into the excavated cellar. Near the opening was a sand pile, and small pieces of wooden boards lay scattered about. When they decided to use the basement

as a hiding place, they closed up the two windows with bricks and mortar. On the unfinished cellar floor, my parents placed a Persian rug which they had brought from home; they also stored a few bare necessities down there for immediate survival. Theirs was considered a good hiding place, but it had one drawback. One person had to remain outside to cover up the entrance with the boards and bricks that lay scattered about, and then throw sand on top to help camouflage the entrance. That person then had to hide somewhere else. Usually there were just a few minutes in which to accomplish this feat. The Germans knew that their prey would try to avoid capture and thus tried to surprise them. Most of the time, Drezl remained outside to cover up the entrance; she helped our grandmother who, advanced in her years, was not as swift as the others.

One of these "catching parties" happened on a Sunday afternoon when most people were home from work. Suddenly they heard heavy military trucks nearby and Germans jumping out off the trucks, shouting orders. In an instant there was not a soul to be seen on the streets. Hurried steps of heavy booted Germans could be heard, followed by crashing noises from broken doors and broken furniture. The cries of people who were caught and who were being herded into trucks, permeated the neighborhood. All of our family got to its hiding place as quickly as possible, except for grandmother. This time she was slower than usual, or perhaps the Germans were faster than on previous occasions. On hearing the Germans approaching, Drezl quickly closed up the entrance to the hiding place, and had just enough time left to run back into the room where our grandmother sat on the edge of her bed. Drezl threw herself down on the floor and wedged herself in the narrow space between the bed and the window. Numbed with fear, she heard German soldiers enter the room and take grandmother with them. She did not know how long she lay in that cramped space, but after what seemed to her a long while, she finally came to her senses. She got up, went to the basement entrance, and uncovering it, released the others from hiding. Then the realization came to her that grandmother's presence in the room had saved her life.

As I listened to Drezl tell this whole story, tears freely ran down my face. I cried because of the tragedy that had befallen us all, but also in that instant I mostly lamented the fate of our parents who were left all alone, without their children and without any other members of our family, and I feared for their lives.

We talked late into the night until we were so fatigued that we finally decided to go to sleep. That night I shared my bed with my sister. We cuddled close to each other, but because of our agitated emotions, neither of us was able to sleep.

Next morning, I went to work while she remained behind in order to be processed and to receive necessary instructions. Somehow I prevailed on the camp commander to let Drezl work in my department. For a short while, Drezl was allowed to learn how to operate my machine, with my help.

The learning process went slowly for her and the overseer did not take kindly to this. He insisted that she start working at her own machine; when she did this, trouble began. She was not able to keep up with the speed, and very soon full spools piled up all around her. The machine in the next department stopped because it wasn't receiving empty spools from her. The overseer would appear every few minutes, shouting obscenities at her, "Du faules Stuck, Juden Bande", hitting her on the neck. Eventually, Drezl couldn't take it any longer and fainted. Helped by another girl, we carried her to the side where she came to by herself, but she was in no physical condition to operate the machine. I was terribly frustrated, witnessing the harassment of my sister and not being able to interfere. Trying to save her, I rushed crazily through my work so that I could help her out. For a short while I operated both machines, but soon I had to give up running from one machine to the other because a backlog of unfinished work was building up at my machine, and I was beginning to feel exhausted.

Drezl never became an efficient machine operator because of her lack of strength, and I always had my hands full keeping her machine operational. Rose's and my partnership now expanded to include Drezl. We shared everything and tried to do everything together. Drezl became somewhat of a mother to both of us.

There came a time when we were once again allowed to write a postcard home. We had always eagerly awaited such a moment, but especially now, we wanted our family to know that Drezl was indeed here with us. So we sent a postcard to my parents with this good news. A few weeks later, we received a replying letter from my mother. In it, she expressed her happiness that we were all together; she also wished me a happy birthday and hoped that, God willing, we would all celebrate my next birthday, reunited. Finally, she sent her and also my father's love. We did not know how to keep this treasured letter safe, treasured, because letters from home were so rare, and were our only remaining connection to our families. Drezl folded the letter neatly, and then made space for it in her clothing, next to her bosom. There it remained, as she carried it safely all through the war. Periodically, we would reread this letter since it turned out to be the last letter we would ever receive from our family, this last bit of connection that we could hold onto. After the war ended, and as the years passed, I somehow erased the awareness of this precious letter from my consciousness. Many more years passed; and then recently,

quite by chance, Drezl very innocently made reference to the letter. I was struck, dumbfounded -- how could I have so completely forgotten about it? All those years, Drezl had been wearing our letter, carrying it in her bosom, close to her heart. She had not mentioned it in all that time for fear that I might also want to have it, for fear of losing it. She kept the letter close to her heart until she died. After her recent death, I inherited it, and now have this last link to my dear mother in my possession, today.

By the latter half of 1943, in our camp confinement, the mail from home stopped arriving altogether -- no more news. We didn't know who or what to blame for this complete curtailment -- could it perhaps be the camp authorities? This silence worried us very much. After a prolonged period, one girl received a letter containing devastating news. The Germans had finally accomplished their goal of "Judenrein"; they had made the cities and ghettos "clean of Jews". This was in the early Fall of 1943. The letter described the final day when the Germans had come en masse with trucks and troops and had surrounded the ghetto. They herded the people aboard a train of cattle cars and shipped them off to a death camp where they would be gassed. Those who tried to defend themselves or to hide were shot to death on the spot. The person who had written the letter was among the very few who did manage to escape and hide among the non-Jews.

What a shattering tragedy: this can't be, this just can't be dear God, we repeated again and again. The day this letter arrived was a black day for us. It simply meant that no one was left at home anymore, no one for us to return to, even if we would ever be able to return. The tragedy was so immense; it shattered our spirits. Panic blocked out everything at first; then people walked around lamenting and crying. Our despair was a darkness, like the night. We existed in loneliness; anguish, burning like the sun focused by a glass, ate away hope. If not for Drezl and Rose who helped me retain some semblance of sanity, I would not have been able to take it. At work, the German women saw our tear-stained faces and our utter despair. Their faces showed compassion, but they were not permitted to express it because they were not allowed to speak to us. When there were finally no more tears left to shed, we sang songs of mourning, especially in the evening. The following song brought our plight to the attention of God Almighty, and was written partially in Hebrew and partially in Yiddish: "Our Heavenly Teacher, look down from heaven and see how your children are being chased around and plagued, and slowly annihilated."

There was an awful feeling of emptiness in us, as though all our strength had been sapped; and as days began blending together, our meager existence continued. Oftentimes, when Drezl and I would lay on our bunk bed, sleep just wouldn't

come. So, we would begin to reminisce about home, and talk of those precious times we had spent with our family. Once Drezl asked me if I remembered the time that our Grandmother journeyed to America to visit her son, my Uncle, Morris Wattenberg, the one who's large portrait had hung in our living room. Many times, I had stood in front of that portrait, admiring him wearing his pince-nez and admiring his stately appearance, though I had never personally known him. I guess that I must have been too young to remember my Grandmother's trip to America, but I very well remembered when she returned. On that morning, I was aroused by my mother with "Get up, get up, Grandma is back from America!"; I could also smell the freshly brewed coffee which Grandma always used to brew each morning, before any of us had awakened, so I knew for sure that she was back. I jumped out of bed and ran into the kitchen, straight into her arms. She had so many stories to tell, each so fascinating to us. She spoke of my Uncle Morris, his wife Aunt Anna, and their three sons, Many, Leonard, and Albert. "You have three cousins in America", she said; she had even brought back pictures. How could I have guessed then, and especially now, that I myself would meet them one day, in America. Now, here in this camp, we wondered if they knew in America what was happening to us and to the Jewish people of Europe. But, how could they know? Did the outside world know what was being done to us; and if they knew, did they care? If they cared, what actions were they taking? All these questions and no answers. It is so hard to have faith. We know that the Allies are fighting the Germans, and so we pray for their victory. "Dear God, please help us. The sun is being overshadowed by so much hate and by the murderous deeds of misguided people. Please, please send us the understanding and wisdom and get us out of here. Open their eyes to the miracle of your diverse and divine creation, so that we may teach and learn from one another, how to live in peace and harmony."

## Chapter 11: Mementos from the Home that Once Was

The only clothing the Germans provided for us in camp was a wraparound smock made out of the raw material woven in our factory, and wooden shoes. Many of us still had some clothing from home, our only and cherished possession, even though it had been patched and mended many times over. Some of us also still had shoes from home.

In the beginning, once every few months, we would gather all shoes in need of repair, and the camp commander would then take them to a repair shop outside of camp. It always took a while until the repaired shoes were brought back, and sometimes inadvertently some shoes were not returned. Whether lost or stollen, for the person whose shoes were missing, this was indeed a big loss. Yet there was not a thing anyone could do about it.

We had in our midst two sisters. One day Lila, the younger of the two, added her shoes to the pile which was to be sent out for repair. When these shoes were eventually returned to us, hers were missing. As a consequence, Lila embarked on a tirade. She accused the camp commander of stealing her shoes, and walked about loudly complaining about it. We suspected that something had snapped in the girl's mind. We tried to reason with her and dissuade her from continuing with this tactic before she came to a bad end; her shoes just weren't worth it. What we didn't realize was that the loss of her shoes was only a symptom -- it wasn't the problem. Lila had reached her breaking point, and this manifested itself in the stand she took over her lost shoes.

One Sunday afternoon, with the camp commander in the company of her superior from the SS, Lila nonchalantly approached them, and in front of everyone, called her a thief. "You have stolen my shoes and I want them back, do you hear me?", she shouted. We were surprised that the SS man did not instantly shoot her; instead she was shipped out to a death camp.

Some weeks later -- another sad incident. A girl from a neighboring camp was brought to us to await a transport leaving from our camp. They had shaved off her hair and had dressed her in a striped uniform. She remained in isolation until the transport was ready to leave. The act she was caught committing, for which she was paying with her life, was that she had allowed an English prisoner of war to make love with her.

## Chapter 12: Haase

We received the dreadful news one Sunday afternoon as we were gathered in the factory yard. The camp commander stood before us and proclaimed that in two weeks we would leave this camp and move into neighboring Haase camp. Our camp and Haase, she said, were being consolidated into one concentration camp. Then she announced that she would not be coming with us since Haase already had its own camp commander.

As much as we hated our camp, we had hoped that perhaps we would be liberated from here. Now, we were moving into new and even more hostile surroundings, with no relief in sight and uncertainty crushing down on us.

The inevitable moment rapidly approached. We packed our few belongings into bundles, donned our clothes, formed a marching column, and moved out through the gate toward Haase concentration camp. With our bundles under the arm or over the shoulder, we walked heavily in the middle of the road. After a while, off to the right, we glimpsed a railway station, then a square dominated by an ungainly statue, thereafter, a cluster of small homes with bicycles everywhere. We were thinking how normal it was for so many other people -- to be at home or maybe out at the movies, to sit somewhere by a fire, have a bath, cook a meal. When would it ever be normal for us again?

Approaching Haase concentration camp, an entirely different picture unfolded before us. The camp was surrounded with heavy barbed wire. At the gate stood heavily armed SS guards; one of these guards confronted us. He had a broad, heavily jowled face, thick eyebrows, bulbous nose with flared nostrils, large mouth with a slightly pendulous lower lip. His eyes looked more Slavic than German. A pistol was bulging at his right side and on his shoulder rested a rifle. I stared at these guns with incredulous dismay; fear crawled clamily over my skin. As we entered the camp, we were counted by two SS women. All this was new for us.

Inside the camp, in the middle of the yard, an entire entourage awaited us -- the camp commander, a platinum blond, heavy-set woman in an SS uniform; surrounding her, several SS women; one high ranking SS male officer; and a leashed dog, a full grown German Shepherd. The old Haase factory building would now house the inmates of this concentration camp.

Several hundred yards away from the factory building stood a two story house, the home and headquarters of the camp commander and of the "Hauptman", the high ranking SS officer. We were directed to march to the other side of the building where we were mustered by the young SS women, shouting orders at us to form even columns. They pushed us

around and hit us, and finally proceeded to count us again. The observing German contingent was greatly amused. The camp commander was in a highly jovial mood, holding forth court like a chieftain. After we had stood in formation for about an hour, the camp commander finally delivered a speech to us. In a loud and commanding voice, she announced, "As you surely know, you're marionettes already". She told us that we were now inmates of this camp, and we would hence forth live by and obey the rules and regulations of Haase camp; otherwise, we would suffer the consequences of very effective punishment techniques. Every morning, we were to assemble here for a head count, and anytime that she or any of the SS women blew a whistle, we were to immediately rush to this assembly place. She then introduced us to the "Judeneldeste", the Jewish Eldest, and instructed us to obey her orders. The Jewish Eldest was a 32 year old woman whose name was Sala. She was of medium height, somewhat attractive, with a slim figure; her disposition was similar to the camp commander's, in that it was iron. Now it was Sala's turn to address us. It was obvious that she tried to copy the mannerisms of her superior. She let us know that she expected total obedience from us, and that we would be occupying one part of the third floor, the top floor, of the building to our right. With formalities concluded, we were ordered to march to our new quarters. We walked across the huge yard and into the building, up the heavy stone stairs, until we reached the third floor. We pushed open a heavy iron door and entered a very large hall with row upon row of bunk beds. The three of us decided to occupy beds on the left side of the hall where there were small windows. Here, we would at least have a view into the yard and even a limited view into the street. After successfully procuring beds in the desired space, we unloaded our bundles and sat down heavily on our beds. Looking at each other, we could see the pain, apprehension, and fear mirrored in each other's faces. "Do you suppose it's a dream" I asked, "a bad dream, that morning or some other awakening could erase?" "No", I heard myself answer, "it's no dream." Having no other choice, we knew that we would just have to make a go of it, to try to outlast the Germans and to survive.

After arranging our bundles and our beds, we lay down to rest for a while. Soon a whistle sounded and Sala appeared, ordering us to gather our pots and to follow her to the ground floor, where we would receive the evening meal. With the black quart pots in our hands, we followed her down the stairs into a long hall where we lined up in front of a kitchen window. The window was flanked on one side by the camp commander, and on the other side by an SS woman. Two women, obviously the cooks, stood behind the window, ready to dish out food. Sala stood at the front of the line, and when each person's turn came to receive food, she gave that person a shove toward the window, where one of the cooks immersed her big ladle into the kettle of soup and then

poured some of it into our pot. A lot depended on the cook's hand motion. If she immersed her laddle deep into the kettle, then the soup would have some substance; however, if she just skimmed the top, then all we got was a little dirty looking water. The next cook handed us the rest of the meal, half of or sometimes a whole potato, the bread ration, and a spoonful of marmalade.

When we lay down on our beds to spend our first night at Haase camp, stars could be seen glittering through the dark square of the window, as if to say, "you are not alone". Tired from the transition and the day's events, I fell into a hard sleep. In the morning, at the sound of the whistle, I awakened quickly; I was at once tense, as reality again bored in.

The winters in Parschnitz were very cold with lots of snow. The scenery was beautiful. We reveled in all the beauty that nature offered us, now that we were forced to walk to and from work in the Walzel factory. Along the road were pine trees covered with snow and little homes that looked like gingerbread houses. Here and there, a light shone through white curtained windows; sometimes smoke could be seen coming from a chimney, a sure sign of life in the house. I remember thinking to myself, "Oh, what would I give to be able to have just a little corner in such a house, clean and warm. To have a stove on which to cook a meal, a hot thick potato soup -- to be able to take a warm bath. Was this still in the cards for us, would this ever again be possible?"

This then was the beginning of life for us at the Haase concentration camp, and it was an entirely new life. If we thought it had been hard until then, compared to this, the past seemed like the Garden of Eden. From now on, every morning we had to appear at the assembly place for a "head count" and scrutiny by the Germans. From the assembly place we marched to work guarded by SS men and women. In the factory, every department had an SS woman guard who stood near the center of the department so that she could control our movements. Whenever one of us needed to use the bathroom, she had to step up to the SS woman, stand at attention and ask her permission to step out; on returning, she again had to stand in front of the guard and say the following: "Mrs SS, I register back". Entering Haase, we were never again able to walk alone.

As time passed at Haase, our health grew steadily worse. Our daily diet was just that -- a forced diet; it was insufficient and very poor. We had lost a lot of weight and worst of all we suffered from vitamin deficiency. Drezl looked drawn and strange, like a skeleton. Rose and I were both losing our hair. Our gums were receding and the teeth were loose. Rose had pockets of pus between her fingers. Drezl had caught a cold in her bladder and was suffering

with terrible pain. At night, we cuddled together in bed; Drezl tried to soothe the pain by warming her stomach against my backside. When the pain became unbearable, I would go down to the kitchen and beg for hot water which I poured into a glass bottle and then applied to her stomach to relieve the pain. We didn't dare tell anyone our problems. Often, the sick were now being transported to "never never land", as we used to call it. Though we didn't know exactly where they were being sent, nevertheless, we knew that no one ever came back from there.

A day soon came when Sala ordered us to clean up the camp for an inspection; it was to be a special occasion. Everything had to be spick and span. We were to receive a visitor, the foremost German henchman, Dr Mengele, the master mind of the "solution to the Jewish problem". It was rumored that Dr Mengele would look over the facilities to determine if it was possible to build a crematorium on the premises. We were terrified; the name Mengele alone could trigger a bone chilling shiver. How much more then did we fear this talk of building a crematorium. We felt that our days were numbered. Nonetheless, we went about thoroughly cleaning the camp. The floors and stairs were washed. The beds were made extra straight. The entrance halls and the kitchen floors were scoured. The yards were swept clean.

We watched through the windows as Dr Mengele arrived. He was a stern looking man attired in a black SS uniform and a long black leather coat. He was cold, ruthless, perfectly equipped for the business of murder, and indulged himself in very sadistic pleasures. Mengele came with an entourage and was shown all around the camp. He walked everywhere and spent about four hours in camp. After Mengele and his party departed, we breathed a momentary sigh of relief, though we were still unsure what the future held in store for us. Not until some later time did we find out that there had indeed been plans to build a crematorium, but that this project was abandoned because of insufficient space.

## Chapter 13: From Inside, Out

Lately our mentor, the man I previously referred to as "Uncle", had been relaying to us pieces of information concerning the situation at the front. For instance, " -- the Germans have been forced to withdraw from portions of the Russian front; elsewhere, they are being hit hard by the Allied forces." And, " -- not enough coal is being shipped from the occupied territories; if this continues, our factory will be shut down since it is powered by coal." We did not know how to react to this news. Would it be good for us if the factory closed? What would happen to us with no employment? Would they do away with us? We were very gratified to hear that misfortunes were finally happening to the Germans, but the uncertainty this created for us, troubled us greatly. One day we received the news that our factory would be shut down the following week, and that we were to be marched on foot as part of a transport into Germany. Instantly, panic set in as we realized that this turn of events would bring about our demise. Indeed, that next week the factory closed, and we awaited the beginning of the march.

Many girls, our trio among them, had begun to save a fraction of the daily bread ration, so as to accumulate some food for the march ahead. Of course, doing this required considerable will power since our rations were insufficient to begin with. We made ready the best of whatever clothing remained. Our main worry however was that we did not have decent shoes in which to walk; all we had were wooden shoes.

Days passed with no activity other than the usual early morning assembly, where we were counted; here we were forced to listen to the Camp Commander lecture us on obedience and reiterate the kinds of punishments to which we could be subjected. The counting of inmates never went smoothly. There were always several SS women on hand to do the job. Each SS woman was in charge of one column which she counted and then reported the count to the Camp Commander, who in turn totaled everything. The SS women were so taken by their superiority and with the task, that when they counted using their outstretched arm, the action of the hand of that arm was less than subtle -- each count was delivered with a bang on the head or a bang on the arm of the inmate, as she passed. Somehow they rarely arrived at the correct figure. Of course, each time the total was wrong, they started the count again. Sometimes this went on for hours. In the end, the Camp Commander almost always delegated this task to our Sala. Because she was a very energetic woman, she rapidly dispensed with this counting "formality". Stepping quickly alongside each column, she counted loudly "two, four, six ... ". Finished, she reported the total to the Commander, and it was always correct. Thereafter, except for those who had duties to

perform such as cleaning bathrooms, halls, stairs, or the kitchen, we were allowed to return to our own hall.

Our respite from work did not last very long; the Germans soon gave us a new task -- digging trenches. Rain or shine, we were marched out to the open fields, where we were given picks and shovels with which to dig trenches. The SS guards were merciless; they stood over us and pushed us to work. Quite often, a pouring rain would drench us and chill our bodies, and our wooden shoes would stick in the claylike earth which made our feet heavier to lift. As the air grew colder, we waited in hunger and desperation for the day to end. When a day's work finally ended, we would drag ourselves back to camp, weary in body and mind. Once in camp, we still had to wash our clay and dirt covered clothes, using a little cold water, and then try to dry them for the next day's work. Often now, we thought back to the factory, and longed for the days when we were still able to work indoors.

## Chapter 14: [The] Wooden Shoes

A pair of wooden shoes, neatly lined up on the stone floor, in the bathroom adjacent to our hall, near the base of the floor-to-ceiling window. The time: two in the morning. A commotion outside the high building. Loud voices and hurried footsteps on the outside awaken the sleeping women inside, where heads raise inquisitively from bunk beds and muffled voices sound. Several girls get up to go to the bathroom, and also to discover what is happening. One girl runs back to report finding the wooden shoes in the bathroom; she also says that all lights are out, both inside and outside of camp. What could this mean? We assume that something important is happening. Perhaps the Allies are near, and the war is finally ending; or maybe we are under attack, and will soon hear war-planes overhead. Whispers are heard all around; "we should prepare ourselves for any eventuality", one girl suggests. There is a general rustling; everyone is securing their prized possession, their wooden shoes, without which one must either go barefoot or steal a pair from someone else. We collect in the dark to gather our clothing, which is most often to be found tucked under the head part of the straw sack on which we sleep. Some dress hurriedly under their military blanket; others dress only part way. All during this general maneuvering, several inquisitive women scurry back and forth to the bathroom window, reporting events occurring outside. One returns to say she has seen two guards pointing at our bathroom window. "Are they coming for us?" she wonders. Another says agitatedly, "I saw the Camp Commander running toward the guards, her uniform unbuttoned, as if she were in a great hurry to get dressed and to come here at this hour of night. She looked up at this window, so I quickly ducked out of sight." Now the hall eldest, awakened by all the noise, rushes in, shouting at us for daring to make such a commotion at night. We become silent at once, and pretend to be asleep. With quiet restored, she walks between the rows of bunk beds to assert her authority and to warn us that if this happens again, she will make sure the guilty ones are punished.

Just then, in the stillness of that moment, we can discern several pairs of footsteps climbing the stairwell; they grow louder as they come closer to our hall. Not knowing what to expect, we hold our breath as the tension mounts. Seconds pass; with the stress, time elongates. Rustling, crackling sounds -- the girl on a bottom bunk bed shouts in an hysterical voice "stop shaking the bed"; the answer comes back, "I can't, I'm so afraid". From the left side of the hall, a harsh whisper: "Something is dripping on me; Hey! Are you crazy? Why don't you go to the bathroom?" "I can't help it" is the reply. "Quiet, Quiet!" shouts the hall eldest. Footsteps approach, the door opens; four people enter preceded by a flashlight beam: the Camp Commander holding the arm of Hana, a guard with a rifle over

his shoulder, and Salla. Hana is one of the girls from our hall, and she is trembling violently. As they march over to Hana's bunk bed, we watch this grotesque procession with fear and curiosity. Hana, tall and thin, mere skin and bones, walks barefoot. At the bunk bed, she hesitates a moment, sits down on the edge, and then stretches out on the straw sack. With the powerful flashlight, the Camp Commander makes a sweeping move around the bunk beds and shouts her order: "Now, all of you, go to sleep, and not a move or another sound!" With that, the entourage leaves. Hana's sister occupies the top bunk of Hana's bed; she quickly slides down to Hana. Laying down next to her, she questions -- what happened, where did she go in the middle of the night -- but to no avail. Hana lies staring into space, the same way she has been acting for quite some time.

Hana has been withdrawn, occasionally repeating words to herself, hardly eating even the little food ration that she receives. Hana doesn't speak to anyone; she stares into the distance, growing thinner by the day. Her sister complained to us that Hana was going crazy. She begged her to snap out of it; she tried to frighten her by telling her that eventually she would be shipped out, but nothing helped; Hana just would not respond.

Slowly, most of us fall asleep now, only to be awakened by a shrill whistle coming from the hall eldest, followed by the screeching command, "Up, up, everyone up. Get dressed and be in the yard in 15 minutes". We beseech her to tell us what happened last night; she says that Hana had opened the upper part of the bathroom window and had jumped. In the process of falling to the ground, she had severed the electrical line, causing the power failure. She, in turn, had landed unscathed on the ground and had walked away with only bad bruises.

Several weeks later, Hana was shipped out.

## Chapter 15: The Hungarian Inmates

Returning from work one day, we were told that a transport of Hungarian women had arrived in camp. We later found out that these women were brought here from Auschwitz concentration camp, and therefore, they were to be held in quarantine for a week. The women were housed in the hall across the stairway, and no one had access to them.

Understandably, we were extremely eager to talk with them, but at present, there was nothing for us to do but to wait. There was a chance that we could sneak in, but there was always the possibility that we would be caught and made to suffer the consequences. The Commander had a violent temper, especially when her orders were disobeyed.

The third day of the quarantine fell on a Sunday. It was a sunny day, and after going through the counting procedure, we were finally dismissed. Most of us lingered in the yard, trying to soak up the sun and the fresh air.

Across the yard, blaring radio music of popular Hitler-era marches could be heard coming from the Camp Commander's house. We were looking up toward the third floor windows where the Hungarian girls were quarantined. Each window consisted of several small glass panes, and the Hungarians had their faces glued to each pane. We waved to them and they waved back. We didn't dare try speaking with them since the "Hauptman" with his dog, the Camp Commander, and several SS women were also in the yard. Suddenly, a head appeared through one of the broken panes and burst into a song. Several windows away, another head appeared in much the same manner and joined in the singing. The first woman had a gorgeous contralto voice and the other, a most beautiful soprano -- both being operatic voices. They started with the Viennese Waltz and continued with songs from popular opera and operetta. The radio blared "Soldaten sind Soldaten" and yet the women continued to sing. The Germans stood dumbfounded. I guess they thought the girls could not out sing the blaring radio; to their amazement the live concert they were hearing was so exquisite, that they soon turned off the radio to listen to the potpourri of songs coming from the windows above. Encouraged by our constant applause, the concert lasted about an hour. Finally, tired, the girls withdrew their heads. The Germans stood smiling; we were in a state of euphoria. For one infinitesimal moment, we had forgotten our plight, our humiliation; we were the victors, not the vanquished.

The quarantine period must have seemed as endless to the Hungarians as it did to us. We were anxious to learn more about them and about the place from which they had come. Finally, at the end of the week, the doors opened and we were allowed to mingle. Our first impression was of horror and shock at the appalling stares with which we were met.

All their heads were shaven; many had sores on their heads. Their skin color was dark with patches of light where the skin had peeled, as if from blistering. Their eyes wore an incoherent expression, as when one tries to teach a dog obedience, and the dog stares back uncomprehendingly. They spoke Hungarian among themselves and German with us. As we began talking and questioning one another, we soon realized that these women had come straight out of a true hell. In some, a blaze of horror could still be seen in their bloodshot eyes. They and their families had been taken from their homes and businesses, herded into one place, and loaded into cattle cars that brought them into Auschwitz Concentration Camp. There, they went through a selection process which separated these people from their families, who were immediately sent to the gas chambers. They, in turn, had spent months in Auschwitz, satisfying a diabolical, animalistic need in the Germans who ran the camp. These women were single-mindedly made to stand hours, even days, exposed to all the elements. Hour after hour, day after day, they stood in a field exposed to both the burning sun, which blistered their bodies and their shaven heads, and the pouring rain, which drenched their bodies, clothed in the blue and white striped uniforms. All around them were people dying from starvation, exhaustion, and exposure; on the other side of the field, a line marched toward the gas chambers. The nauseating, sweet smelling smoke of burning bodies billowed from the tall chimneys of the crematoria and permeated the air. The gas chambers and crematoria were in full operation, and the threat of being the next to be led along the path of death was ever present. After this prolonged period of torture, they were granted a last-second reprieve -- they were put on a train and brought here to us.

Along with the Hungarians came a cargo of clothing once belonging to those people who had been annihilated in Auschwitz. On arrival in Auschwitz, people were told to disrobe and enter shower rooms for "entlausung" -- delousing; these rooms were gas chambers in disguise, where, instead of water, gas came out of the showerheads. The Germans performing this systematic execution could look through a small window, allowing them a ringside view of the way people died. They could see people gasping for air, clawing with their hands at their own and at each others bodies, in the agony of suffocation. After succumbing to the poisonous fumes, their badly contorted bodies were finally found heaped on the floor, with blood spurting from mouths, ears, and other orifices. The "Sonder Kommando", a special force consisting of Jewish camp inmates, then hauled the bodies to the crematoria and burned them in the ovens. Often, among these victims, they would find their own relatives. Very few of the "Sonder Kommando" remained alive to tell their horror stories; they were periodically annihilated so that they could not bear witness to this cruel, most horrible and carefully planned mass extinction

of innocent people. Once the corpses had been removed, the "shower" rooms were hosed off to eradicate the tell-tale marks of death -- blood, feces, urine, and bits of hair; these rooms were then once again ready for the next contingent of victims who followed in quick succession. The dead left heaps and heaps of clothing behind, in piles. From these, the Hungarian women were allowed to choose an exchange of clothes for their striped uniforms. Whatever remained after the Hungarians were clothed, was distributed among us. I received a very nice winter coat which I badly needed. The coat was beige in color with four buttons down the front and had a detachable hood. The coat once belonged to a young Jewish girl whose life ended so very tragically at Auschwitz, and whose identity I shall never know. The coat made me think of her, and this poem was born:

Your coat -- my inheritance from you
how it warmed my body
how it broke my heart
can't stop thinking of you
oh, you nameless soul, my compatriot
but -- where, where are you now, you lofty soul
what terrible pain did you endure in your short travail
on this earthly plain?
on wings of innocence and purity you surely fly
what earthly features were thine?
maybe eyes of violet blue
with fair skin as subtle as jasmine
what promise did your unfulfilled future hold?
would your fingers have strung music,
   to delight the heart and ear
or would you have strived along the path of Madam Curie?
Perhaps, an angel of mercy you would have been
or just a mother delighting in her children.
Perhaps -- perhaps -- oh, we shall never know.
We long for the music that is not played
and the songs that are not sung
and we weep for the outstretched hands
in fervent hope for help that never came to you,
   to thousands, nay to millions.
So, -- watch over us from your heavenly heights,
and say a prayer for a better world.

Although we suffered terribly from hunger, somehow with much effort, we learned to discipline ourselves. Perhaps the long years of incarceration had taught us this lesson. The Hungarian women however did not know how to cope with this problem; they knew no discipline. Any food ration which they received, was immediately eaten, leaving nothing for a subsequent meal. They were constantly ravenous, and thus they became scavengers, eating out of trash cans and picking up any edible filth. Once we became more acquainted, we discovered a startling fact -- a preponderance of these

women came from the higher echelon of the society in their home towns, from well-to-do families, and very many of them were professionals. By itself, that of course did not seem so unusual; what was unusual and what had startled us was that until they found themselves in this predicament, most of these women did not know of their Jewish heritage. They did not practice Judaism and were far removed from it. Some were products of mixed marriages. In some cases it was only a grandmother or a grandfather who was Jewish. Hitler and his cohorts sought out these dormant Jewish backgrounds, and made them pay for it.

Because of the inactive, deteriorating existence in Auschwitz and its demoralizing effect, these women were not used to helping themselves. They tried to live because of the instinct to survive, but they did not know how to go about it. The means for any sort of hygiene in our camp were almost nil - nonexistent. However, if one was determined, really determined, one could be reasonably clean. It meant that one would sometimes have to stand in line an hour or longer in front of the kitchen door to receive a quart of warm water with which to wash one's hair. It also meant that no matter how cold it was or how tired one was, a cold shower was better than none.

The Hungarians' attitude for survival was to live from day to day. They were thoroughly lice infested -- their clothes and their heads, even though they did not have long hair, were full of lice. They were constantly scratching themselves, until eventually their skin was full of scratch marks. In the evenings, they would sit together, picking lice from each other's head and clothing. It took them some time to realize that they needed to change this attitude; otherwise, they would become instrumental in helping the Germans accomplish their goal -- namely, to dehumanize us. The change in attitude, when it came about, showed itself in many ways. For instance, during the time that the factory outside camp was still in operation, a group of our girls working in its weaving mill, smuggled back into camp bunches of white bleached yarn -- the same yarn which they were using in their weaving. They were also able to obtain knitting and crocheting needles from some of the German women. Then, in the evenings and on weekends, these girls used to knit and crochet sweaters, socks, and gloves. With the closing of the factory, came an end to this supply of yarn; however, some of the girls had accumulated and hidden a store of yarn which they were trading for bread and other goods. The kitchen staff, who had acquired most of this yarn, commissioned several of the Hungarian women skilled in the art of intricate knitting, to create in their spare time, the most beautiful patterns and fashions, for which they were paid with extra food rations.

Vivid memories of the quarantine and the subsequently very moving concert by Lilly and Magda, prompted us often to

beseech them to sing for us. At bedtime, we would open the doors leading from hall to hall; with everyone in bed and the lights out, their singing would begin. A stillness prevailed through which only their voices could be heard, performing popular classics; when the songs came to an end, either quietly or in a crescendo, some people had been lulled to sleep, some sobbed quietly, and others just lay enjoying the beauty of these voices.

With the help of the Hungarian women, we decided to produce a show, hoping that this would give us a lift. We petitioned the Camp Commander for permission, which, I imagine, due to her own curiosity, she granted us. Several women were chosen to direct the show, and they immediately began scouting for talent. Naturally, our singers, Lilly and Magda, were selected. Among the Hungarians, they found a woman who had been a ballerina and persuaded her to take charge of the choreography. We met to determine the program for the show; it consisted of musical selections, recitations, skits, and classic as well as acrobatic dancing. I was given the small solo appearance of imitating a trumpeting announcer.

On weekends, we rehearsed with a fervor befitting professional performers, and we always had an audience. They jested at the way we performed; some even scolded us for indulging in such frivolities, but nothing could deter us from our goal. After many weeks of rehearsing, we were finally ready. The show took place on a Sunday. We cleared the middle of the hall, brought in several long tables, and put them together to form a stage. We rigged a curtain made from blankets which we hung from a rope. Rows of chairs and benches were set up in front of the stage. The hall filled with women; those who could not find a chair, sat on the floor. When the time for curtain call came, even the Camp Commander and the SS women had arrived to take up places in the doorway. The show progressed beautifully, with the musical selections as the highlight. The recitations were poignant and the skits very funny; the dancers were clumsy, with the exception of one athletically inclined girl who executed several summersaults, head stands, and fancy handstands. We poked fun at our kitchen staff, and even dared to express sarcasm in this parody on the Camp Commander: "... she dresses us in the latest fashion, which is why we are so elegantly attired!" . This drew gales of laughter from the Germans.

The show was a great success, at least because we had taken the initiative to do something extraordinary, something unprecedented in our camp. It pulled us out of our rut for a short while, giving us a lift and the strength to go on.

## Chapter 16: A Visit from Our Brothers

The winter of 1944/45 was no different in its harshness than winters in years past. However, in previous years, we were able to work inside a factory, whereas, this winter we were laboring, digging trenches in some distant field. On several occasions, while marching to and from work, we saw at a distance, columns of shabby looking men dressed in what looked like striped uniforms. They were heavily guarded by armed SS soldiers; this gave us the clue that these might be Jewish men. We wanted to get nearer to see who they could be. Who knew - perhaps our relatives were among these men. We were so close and yet so distant from them. Though our hearts went out to them, there was nothing that we could do; they went their way and we went ours. One day, after our return from work, as we were filing through the gate to be counted, we realized that something strange was happening inside our camp. We saw a concentration of armed guards near our barracks, with many more guards milling around in the yard. We were directed toward a different building entrance than the one we used everyday. Quickly, we climbed the stairs, and on entering the hall, we were deluged with reports from the girls who had spent the day in camp. The girls told us that a convoy of Jewish men had arrived; they were on a forced march into Germany and had stopped here to rest. They were now to be lodged here, in our building, on the main floor.

Before the convoy was to enter the camp grounds, the Camp Commander and the SS women went from hall to hall and instructed us to fetch dark pieces of cloth from the storage room and to drape them over each window. They then forbade us to look outside to see what was going on. Since we were not offered any explanation, it is safe to surmise that many of the women were frightened, but also curious. When we subsequently heard noise coming from the yard, one woman pushed the cloth aside and looked through the glass pane into the yard, where she could see the heavily guarded convoy of men in striped uniforms. Unfortunately, at that same moment, one of the guards looked up toward our windows, and seeing her face, aimed his rifle and fired a shot that struck the woman in the forehead, smashing her brain. Instantly dead, she fell backwards, splashing blood all around her. At the order of the Camp Commander, her body was promptly removed and the spilled blood washed away.

Our normal routine of washing and of making preparations for the next day were forgotten -- we were so distraught by what had happened. And yet, the thought of finding a relative or even a friend among those men, again entered our minds. All we could do was mill about until it was time to go down for the evening food ration. The Camp Commander was waiting for us in front of the kitchen window. After we were all assembled, she blew her whistle and delivered this directive: "Now, you all had better listen. I don't want

any of you even thinking about communicating with or getting close to those men.". With food in hand, we returned to our hall and sat down as usual on our beds to eat. Once finished eating, we separated into small groups.

Even with the risk of receiving a severe beating or of being killed if caught, several of us quietly stole down a flight of stairs and entered the huge unoccupied factory hall, below. In the semidarkness, we sought for openings between the pipes which extended through all three floors of the building. In order to see anything through these openings, we had to lie flat on the floor and squeeze our faces as close as possible to the pipe. Thus, through one eye, we had a restricted view of the specific area directly below us, and here is what we saw. A dim light illuminated the hall; the floor was covered with straw; the men were dressed in filthy blue and white striped concentration camp uniforms; their bodies were mere skeletons, with their uniforms hanging like rags; their faces were ashen; their apathetic mood was revealed through their movements. These men were the so called "muselmans", walking skeletons. Sweating, listening to the murmur reaching us through the opening, we watched one man sluice his face in a pot of water. The unfolding tragedy that came from an awareness of what we were seeing, gripped us with an emotional intensity that tore at us and chocked us with pain. We lifted ourselves up from the floor and looked dismally at each other. One girl burst out in painful sobbing, repeating to herself "Dear God, why did you let them do this to us?". After regaining some composure, we determined that somehow we must get whatever food we could spare, to these men. Returning to our hall, we related our experience and our conviction to all the women. With minimal discussion, our group in the hall decided to each give up a slice of bread, in favor of the men. Now came the problem of how to get the bread to the men; checking the opening around the pipes, we realized that a thin slice of bread could be pushed through. Once again, taking the bread with us, we descended the flight of stone steps to the floor below. At first, we hesitated pushing bread through the opening, for fear it might land in the straw without being noticed by anyone. Searching, we found a pipe with a man laying nearby, stretched out in the straw. I pushed a piece of bread through the opening and then quickly looked through the hole to see what had happened. The man had noticed the bread but hadn't spotted from where it had come. He looked rapidly about, grabbed the bread, concealing it on his body inside his striped jacket, and then lay back as if nothing had happened. We repeated this process again and again; each time the same thing happened, except that by now he had located the source of the bread. Alarmed that only one man would hoard all this bread, we moved to another pipe to try once more. This time two men spotted the bread simultaneously and were ready to fight each other for this windfall, this precious piece of bread. To avoid this

quarrel, we pushed to them several more pieces. Again, we relocated ourselves and dropped several slices; without a sideways glance, a man immediately flung himself directly onto the straw where the bread lay and remained there motionless for what seemed an immense amount of time. In the hope that the men below who had received bread would yield their positions to allow others a chance for an extra slice of bread, we temporarily interrupted our activity and cautiously returned to our hall to fetch more bread. We then threw down all that we had brought with us, hoping that they would distribute it among themselves. As we were leaving on the way back to our barracks, we noticed that when these men left their quarters to go to the toilet, they passed close to the base of the stairs. This appeared to us to be another opportunity to smuggle them more bread. There was, however, this problem: guards who stood at the door of the men's quarters and at the door of the toilet, could easily look up the stairs and see us. The only obstruction available for use was a wall which separated the hallway from the stairway, behind which we could hide. From the beginning, we knew the risk of being caught, but that did not deter us from doing the job. We brought out all the remaining bread and stationed ourselves behind the wall. Two girls managed the pile of bread, and I stood in front of them, holding a single piece. Whenever I heard an inmate emerge to go to the bathroom, I glanced out from behind the wall to assess the situation; with the slice of bread in my hand, I waited until the man passed near the foot of the stairs and then threw the piece of bread out, in front of him. This would startle the man momentarily, but he would then grab the bread and continue on. The word got out and in no time at all, we had a real exodus on our hands. Every few minutes several new men emerged. Everything was proceeding smoothly with only a few pieces left; suddenly, just as I threw several slices for two men passing, an SS woman walked through the front door and saw the bread land. She looked up at us; I turned quickly and said to the girls, "let's run". Two steps at a time, I ran as fast as my legs would carry me up the stairs, the other girls behind me, with the SS woman in pursuit. Luckily, one of the girls and I made it up the stairs, through the door, and into our hall, where we jumped onto the first empty bed and pretended to be asleep. The trailing girl only made it as far as the door, where the SS woman caught her, grabbed her by the hair, dragged her out into our hall, and repeatedly slapped her in the face. The girl flinched and cowered back as she held a hand over her swelling cheek. The German then threw her to the floor and kicked her repeatedly with her heavy shoe, hitting her head, neck, and back, until the girl lost consciousness and lay there in a bloody heap. The SS woman was so full of hatred that her eyes appeared to be blurred as if seen through a prism. As her rage subsided, she began to circle her victim, demanding in a shrill voice that she reveal her accomplices: "Du Dreckstuck - which of you was down there throwing bread to the men Schweine?" She grabbed

the first available girl and hit her, but the girl vehemently denied being involved. We, of course, did not dare respond, so she soon left saying that she would fetch the Camp Commander. Quickly we picked up our battered comrade from the floor and lay her on a bed where she luckily regained consciousness. We washed the blood off her body and face and put compresses on the severe bruises. We were just finishing administering to her injuries, when we heard agitated voices and hurried footsteps outside. Entering with the SS woman, the Camp Commander unleashed a barrage of swears and curses, shouting: "Verflucht nocheinmal, Schweine Hunde, I told you not to go near those men. You have too much bread; otherwise, you wouldn't be giving it away. Tomorrow there will be no bread ration for you. And if you give away one more breadcrumb, I'll take your bread away altogether. Don't let me catch you down there again!". Fuming with rage, they both left the hall.

Next morning, with the advent of sunrise, many of us who had spent a restless night, took up positions at the windows overlooking the courtyard, to see what would happen to the convoy of male inmates. Soon, two men with a guard left the building, walked across the courtyard and disappeared from our view. They reappeared pushing a two-wheeled flat-topped cart, and brought the cart up to the entrance doorway. What transpired next came close to breaking our spirits. Several minutes elapsed and then the two men emerged carrying a corpse -- a dead inmate. One had him by the arms and the other by the legs. They heaved the corpse onto the cart's flat top. This done, they went back in and brought out another corpse. They continued to come and go, loading bodies, until the cart was full of dead men, splayed on top of each other, face up or down, with arms and legs hanging off the sides of the cart. Then the two laborers, accompanied by a guard, pushed the grotesquely laden cart across the courtyard. Watching the procession of this caravan to its dumping grounds, physically sickened many of us, who then had to retreat to the bathroom to vomit. This horrific scene in the courtyard, played itself out over and over again, until all the men who died during the night were disposed of.

Through all the years of suffering, both bodily and mental anguish, denied the basic necessities, stripped of freedom, torn from our families, nothing was as shocking as seeing our people being reduced to rubbish, because this was the way rubbish was disposed of in our camp. Shivering, I tried to hug myself tightly, since I had no control over the reflexive spasms with which my body now twitched. Several minutes passed before the violence of the trauma began to ebb. I knew that the scenes I had just witnessed would be permanently branded in my memory.

A shrill whistle announced that another day was to begin for us, and so, after the daily routine of counting and

recounting, off to work we went. Cold, raining -- the day was as long and bleak as was our future. Drenched, chilled to the bone -- we worked with our picks and shovels in silence. Occasionally, one of us would raise her tear stained, rain splattered face, and emit a painful sigh. In the evening, our columns moved heavily, sluggishly back toward camp.

We dried ourselves, warmed our bodies, and were given our meager supper ration. We clustered together, pots in our laps, and ate hungrily. Later, someone brought this news: the men were now boarding in a hall adjacent to the kitchen -- the wall dividing these two rooms was makeshift, with many cracks, through which one could see and talk with these men. Several of us volunteered for kitchen clean up duty in order to try to visit with them; however, we were not the only ones with this idea. Other girls had already found their way to the kitchen, but with a little cunning and resourcefulness, we were also able to get in. The kitchen's back wall consisted of single boards nailed onto a frame of two by fours, and many boards were not nailed together closely enough, thus creating gaps. Through these openings, we were now trying to eye each other. The men peered at us and we at them; we talked together, inquiring of each other's whereabouts. The conversations were hurried and feverish: "... my name is Salzman and I come from Sosnowiec. I am looking for my brother. Is there a Salzman among you? ..." I hear a man whisper to the man behind him: "Salzman, do you know someone by that name?" The man behind answers: " ... no ...". The first one repeats it and in the same breath asks: " 'Do you have something for me?' ... 'What do you want?' ... 'Food, clothing, anything ...' ". I pulled off my socks, stuffing them through the slits. Someone nudges me -- "move over to another opening". I comply by moving to a different opening, and another girl takes my place. At this new slit, two men's faces squeeze together peering through the crack. Again I inquire about my brother. One of the men looks at his companion as if for the first time, then turning towards me answers "no". I question again, "Where do you come from?"; they respond simultaneously "Lodz". "How long are you on the road?" -- "A long time." "How many are you?" -- they answer, "many died, many died" and all the while I shake with deep emotion. They seem so incoherent; the smell -- the foulness of their bodies, their soiled clothes -- continuously wafts up at me to the point that it becomes unbearable to stay. "What can I do for you?", I ask. "Bring us anything; it is so cold outside". We walk away, while others remain to talk. Upstairs, we share the news with the rest. One of us starts to collect articles of clothing -- shawls, socks, and knitted hats. Taking these items with us on our next trip down to the kitchen, we push them through the cracks between the boards. We become even more aware of the stench that permeates the area, the foul smell of death. That night is a sleepless night for me. My

thoughts stir and shy along the eddies and edges of reality. But there is no refuge, no escape from reality. The question persists in my mind and revolves endlessly -- when will all this end? Finally, I sit up on the bunk bed, trying to get a grip on myself, desperately trying to still my mind.

In the early morning hours, I am drawn to the window, held there as if by a magnet. Again, they load two full carts of the dead. The corpses resemble rag dolls with arms and legs hanging every which way. "Dear God, does any people deserve such punishment, especially we, your chosen people. What is to become of us?"

The convoy of men left before we returned from work that evening. We never found out where they were taken or if any of them survived the ordeal.

## Chapter 17: The Many Miracles of 1945

This winter, with the harshness of the cold weather, proved to be more severe than any previous winter of my captivity. We were inadequately dressed and fed, and what's more, there was no relief in sight. This is the winter of 1944/45, and even the Germans themselves have to tighten their belts. Coal and food, the two most necessary commodities, are more scarce than ever before. We eagerly anticipate the arrival of Spring. Bits of news reach us that the Germans have suffered heavy losses at the front, but here, in the concentration camp, not much has changed. Earlier in the year, our medical doctor, a male, was shipped out from our camp, and for a time we did not have a doctor on the premises. Then in the middle of that winter, a Russian woman doctor, a prisoner of war, was brought in to be our resident doctor. Other than dispensing aspirins and diagnosing illnesses, there was not much that she could do to help us because of the lack of medical equipment and supplies.

In the beginning of March, something happened which I clearly view as a miracle. A transport of women marching by, stopped in our camp to spend the night. Because we were all the same gender, the Germans were more relaxed, and although the transport was kept separate from us, we nevertheless managed to mingle and to speak with them. They told us that they had been on the road for just a few days. Their physical condition was not too bad; however, their mental state and emotional health was catastrophic. Not knowing where they were being taken nor how long they would be able to endure walking, made them very apprehensive of what was to become of them. Indeed, they had due cause to be apprehensive. We now know that a large percentage of concentration camp inmates died on those marches.

While I mingle and talk with one of the girls from the transport, I suddenly hear my name being called by someone in a far corner of the room. I turn around to look and cannot believe my eyes. For a moment, I stand stone still; then, shouting "Miriam", I launch myself at her. Soon we are in each other's arms, crying joyously. Miriam is my cousin; her father, Uncle Maier is my mother's brother. Miriam is two years younger than me and a girl of very tiny stature. Now, we are standing in the middle of the room, surrounded by all the girls, who are as amazed as me by this lucky happenstance. Someone had run to fetch Drezl who approaches us with utter disbelief evident in her eyes. As Drezl recognized Miriam's tear stained face in the middle of the crowd, she became hysterical with emotion. And then a cruel reality began to seep in. The transport was to leave tomorrow morning, and with it would go Miriam. We had to think, and think fast of what we could do, what we should do.

Drezl and I go back to our hall and together with Rose we sit on our beds and analyze the situation. We acknowledge the fact that lately the Germans have not been very accurate in counting us. We consider approaching the Camp Commander and begging her permission to allow Miriam to remain with us, but we abandon this idea as being too risky -- if she refuses, we would then have no other recourse. Reluctantly, we resolve to take matters into our own hands, and if need be, to pay the consequences. We go back to Miriam and tell her that she is to stay with us, and that she will have to lay low for a while. Miriam readily agrees, and so, as inconspicuously as possible, we take her back to our hall, into our corner where our beds are. Here we try to make Miriam as comfortable as possible. From this moment on, she is going to share in everything that is ours. During the morning counting, she would remain in the hall, trying not to be noticed. We know that we are taking a great gamble, but there just isn't any other way. That evening, we lie together in the shared bed, and talk late into the night about home, our families, and about Miriam's camp life. Finally, everyone is overtaken by sleep, and though my eyelids are heavy with sleep, my mind is full of memories, as I recall how my long journey began. It all seems such a long time ago. Where are they all; what has happened to them, to my parents and Motek, to Uncle Maier his wife and son, and to all the rest of the uncles and their families?

Miriam's presence went unnoticed, due to the Germans' laxity and carelessness. The change in their attitude was evident, in that they were now largely preoccupied with themselves. They were assigning us any kind of job, just to keep us occupied. What happened one morning in March of 1945, came about precisely because of such carelessness.

The day began routinely. We got up, dressed, and assembled in the courtyard for the routine counting; this took about one and one half hours. We remained standing in columns while the Camp Commander and SS women conferenced to make their plans for our day. Then the SS women approached us and divided us into several groups. I found myself in a group of about seventy five girls. Soon several guards and one SS woman were assigned to lead us. We marched out of the camp, into the street, and proceeded in a different direction than was our usual path. After roughly an hour's march, we approached a single train track, and we followed the track a quarter mile, until we came to a bend, where the track sat on top of a high embankment. There, at the bend, stood a train of about a dozen full coal cars, which we were now told to unload. We were each given a shovel and then told to climb up the embankment onto the full coal cars, several of us to a car, and to then start shoveling. At about eleven o'clock, I felt the need to relieve myself. As I jumped down from the box car, my momentum unexpectedly caused me to run down to the bottom of the embankment, where I began to look for the SS woman in order to ask her

permission to step out on the side so that I could relieve myself. I didn't see her, and so I continued to walk around the bend. There I found the SS woman, standing next to a guard, amusing herself and laughing loudly. In that same instant, I chanced to catch a fleeting glance of the caboose of a rapidly approaching train. I had just enough time to utter, "Oh my God", and then heard the tremendous crash of the train into our coal cars. I saw box cars flying through the air, together with the girls working in them. In an instant, it was all over, and all that the other girls and I, who were fortunate enough not to be on the embankment, could see was smashed and derailed cars. The box cars of the other train were empty; that train rammed into us while backing up, and the engineer in that locomotive was unharmed. Suddenly, the air was filled with the screams of the injured and the trapped, pleading for help; one could hear the groans of those who were half conscious. What a tragedy this was, what a horrible sight. Somehow God must have been watching over us; no one was killed in the accident, but many were badly hurt. One girl had severe compound fractures of one of her legs. She lay on the ground, in the midst of the wreckage, with her shinbone sticking up in the air, and the flesh hanging down, mingling with the coal and dirt. She lay in her own blood, fully conscious. She kept repeating to herself in a weak voice, "my leg, I've lost my leg, where is my leg". Not far from her, lay another with both legs broken. Some had fractured collarbones, ribs, and arms. Still others sustained a brain concussion, and at minimum, bruises and lacerations. In the next half hour, a Hitler Youth Red Cross helper arrived, and began to dispense first aid, applying a bandage and a band aid, here and there. Luckily, news reached our camp quickly, and the Russian camp doctor and a nurse were dispatched to the scene of the accident. Shortly thereafter, a few trucks arrived, onto which the wounded were being loaded. We constructed makeshift stretchers out of pieces of wood and anything else that we could find. We slid Rae, with her shattered leg, onto one such stretcher, and hoisted her onto a truck. After the wounded had been evacuated back to camp, the rest of us who were able to walk, formed a column and marched back. We arrived tired and felt extremely anguished from the ordeal, but also immensely fortunate; those who had been injured were the unfortunate ones. As I entered the hall, Drezl came running toward me, scooped me into her arms, and began to cry in utter relief. She ran her hands all over my body to make sure that I was, indeed, not hurt.

In the infirmary, additional beds were set up in order to accommodate all those who had been injured. Our doctor and nurse did all they could to help alleviate pain; however, they did not have the necessary supplies nor the medication to do the job adequately. There was no plaster of Paris available for the broken limbs, and there was no appropriate medication to relieve the pain. Some plaster of Paris

finally arrived several days after the crash, but by then those limbs were terribly swollen, and it was impossible for the doctor and nurse to do the job correctly. Rae's leg had to be amputated, but the doctor did not have the necessary surgical tools; an ordinary handsaw was sterilized and used for the job, and her leg was removed above the knee.

The nights were the worst, with the moaning of those who were injured and in pain, permeating the stillness. Days, then weeks went by with no relief in sight. However, in that time, a subtle change in the Germans' behavior became noticeable, though we could not identify any specific aspect of that change. The only noticeable change was that we were no longer leaving camp to do our daily work. The Germans only made a haphazard effort to keep us occupied. Most of the time, we just milled around in the camp, doing some camp duty.

This is now April of 1945. The days are getting warmer, and whenever the sun is out, shining, we try to spend more time in the yard. The Germans seem very agitated and pick on us more easily than usual. The loudspeaker doesn't broadcast as loud or as often anymore. As we now look out through the windows facing the once quiet street, we can see throngs of people moving either on foot or in small vehicles, piled high with household goods. Everyone and everything, including lone soldiers, are moving in the same direction, toward the interior of the country, away from the borders. We realize then that, remarkably, the war's end is approaching. A rumor reaches us that the Germans have planted explosives in the camp, so that in a retreat, they could destroy the camp and blow up the inmates -- all of us. Naturally, we have no way of knowing the validity of this rumor. One thing however is certain and has been proven to us many times; the Germans are capable of any devilish act. We could not dismiss this story of the explosives as untrue; nor could we, sadly, do anything about it, if it were.

The month of April passed in a feverish and eager anticipation, knowing the war's end was close at hand and yet uncertain of what was to be our fate. The exodus in the streets continued, and now we could even hear shooting in the distance. Suddenly, as we arose one morning, the news reached us that the guards were gone! A moment later, someone announced that the Camp Commander and all the SS women had also fled; in fact, there were no Germans left in the camp. For the first time, the street was very quiet, and very few people were passing by the camp. We were terrified by the thought that at any moment, the rumored explosives might be detonated. We also considered the possibility that the Germans could have set a trap for us. Perhaps the guards were hiding somewhere, waiting for us to leave the camp, so that they could shoot and kill us. For so many years, we had been indoctrinated to fear; now we could not do otherwise. At the same time, we wondered --

where could we go? Certainly not in the direction the Germans had gone; and were we to go the other way, we would be caught up in the fighting. So, it seemed that the safest course was to remain here and wait.

There was no food left here, in the camp; there was no leadership or authority to follow, and so it left everyone to fend for herself. Most of us spent our time at the windows, observing every move outside. Somehow, we did not notice two girls who bravely ventured outside the camp. We only saw them when they were returning to camp, carrying bundles of shoes in their arms, pairs of blue and red leather shoes! One of them waved a pair of shoes in the air and shouted, "There's a shoe factory not far from here, where there are hundreds of dozens of shoes". In an instant, fear was transformed into desire; the entire camp emptied and its women took to the streets, running toward the factory. We were running, not realizing that these were our first steps of freedom. In the factory, we found boxes upon boxes of shoes, neatly stacked against the walls. Within a very few moments, this neat factory became a complete shambles. Boxes flew through the air, with everyone grabbing for shoes. Rose and I were right there, in the throng, and I knew that I had to be fast. I grabbed one pair of shoes and held them tightly, but by the time I reached out for another pair, there were only individual shoes left. So I snatched four single shoes, all of different colors and sizes, and then, suddenly, there were no more shoes left. Rose had also managed to get an armful of individual shoes. Carrying our bounty, we returned to the camp, where Drezl and Miriam were waiting for us. When Rose and I combined our loot, we discovered that we had in our possession six pairs of shoes (that is, six left and six right shoes), with one additional shoe. However, there was only one matching pair of shoes; the rest were mismatched individual shoes, either because of size or because of color. This seemed to be true for almost everyone, and so, an exchange began to take place. It took a few days before the colors and sizes were matched. There were a few who were only able to match the sizes, but not the colors. Well, they didn't fret about it; they were grateful to have a decent pair of shoes, their first in a long time. What did it matter if one shoe was red and the other one blue? At that moment, they didn't care!

Now, our food situation was becoming desperate, with no food left in camp, and no way of obtaining any. Then, one day, the owner of the factory, Herr Walzel, for whom we had worked all these years, showed up unexpectedly in our camp. We were completely surprised to see this man, and for having the interest, the nerve, and also the courage to appear, we gave him the respect that he was due. After all, no one would blame us if we unloaded all of our frustrations on him. He stood up on a box in the middle of the yard and told us that he was going to try to provide us with some

food. Shortly thereafter, some potatoes and bread arrived which alleviated our immediate hunger.

On the morning of May the 6th, the street was quiet and not a living soul could be seen outside. The quiet and the ghostly stillness were only interrupted by the sporadic shooting which could be heard in the distance. Suddenly, a motorcycle with a helmeted rider wearing black leather pants and jacket, appeared at one end of the street, its engine roaring. As he reached the camp, the motorcyclist slowed down and then turned in. He got off the machine and stood, looking around. In the yard were two women who ventured over to him. The man held out his hand and said, "I am Russian, and a forerunner of the Russian troops, who will soon be here." This news spread with lightning swiftness, and what followed is absolutely indescribable; there were joyful shouts, tearful embraces, and much more. A throng of women gathered around him. Someone told him about the recent train accident, about the girls who were in pain and in need of medical attention, and he asked to be led to them. On entering the sick room, he saw the sorry state of affairs. He spoke to the jubilant Russian doctor, and then he knelt down at one bed and cried bitterly. A minute or two later he regained his composure and announced to us that he had to get back to his division; with that, he left.

Now, all the able bodied and even the not so able bodied inmates of the camp poured out into the street in front of the camp and waited with great anticipation for the Russian troops to arrive. Soon they came, glorious and beautiful. The tanks rolled majestically down the middle of the street, toward us. "It's true, it's actually happening; those are the Russians and they are here to free us" -- these and many other words of hope could be heard rolling through this gathering of inmates. Suddenly, we couldn't wait any longer and started running toward them, waving our arms and showing our tearstained faces. We shouted with joy and climbed on the tanks to ride with them. What glory, what happiness! Can any one person, can any words, can anything describe the emotions welling up in our hearts? The years of yearning, the years of suffering and pain, the years of hope and despair, the years of degradation and shame. We had persevered, that's for sure, we who were still alive. We were free at long last! But, our freedom was not complete, nor could it ever be complete -- we realized this almost immediately. Where were the others, our mothers and fathers, our brothers and sisters? Where were the innocent little children; what had been done to them? Could we be completely free, not knowing? Unfortunately, the answer is, no. The stigma of this enourmous tragedy will forever remain with us, the concentration camp survivors. Soon, we realized that, for all intents and purposes, we were free; but where were we to go -- to the home we did not have, to the family that was no more? Drunk with every possible emotion, we embraced the soldiers, who cried and laughed,

together with us. The Russians brought food into the camp, and for the first time since our imprisonment began, we ate to our hearts content.

As our first evening of freedom approached, the soldiers brought out an accordion and a few harmonicas. They played and sang beautiful Russian songs, songs of their countryside and homeland, songs about family life in Russia and about loved ones whom they had to leave behind. They danced the Cossack's dances and drank vodka; some drank themselves into a state of stupor. All was well before the soldiers started drinking. Now, darkness fell on the camp. The electrical wires had been severed and there was no light in the camp. Most of us left the Russians in the yard and retired indoors for the night. It didn't take very long however, until screams were heard all over camp. Though it was dark in the camp and though they were drunk, the soldiers nevertheless found their way into our halls and tried to get into bed with some of the girls. When the girls screamed and refused to submit to them, asking the soldiers to leave them alone, the Russians were obstinate and acted hurt. "After all," they contended, "we fought for you, we freed you. Now you should be my girl and sleep with me", they insisted. They groped from bed to bed, looking for someone who was understanding and willing. That night turned into a night of wakeful vigilance. When day broke, we were exhausted from the fright and constant vigilance. In order to avoid a repetition of this night, we came up with an idea, which we hoped would keep out unwelcome visitors to the camp, especially at night. In front of the camp, we posted a sign, reading: "Beware! Do Not Enter -- Typhoid Fever Epidemic In The Camp!" We were sure that this would take care of the problem. Unfortunately, it did not; it only curtailed it to a degree. Those who did come in, said that they had no fear of typhoid fever!

On the second day of our freedom, an ambulance arrived and took all the sick and injured to a hospital, where they received proper care. Unfortunately, most of the fractured and partially healed limbs, had to be broken again and reset. The girl who had both legs fractured, spent the better part of a year in the hospital, where her legs were reset numerous times to correct the damage; but to no avail, she remained a cripple. The one who lost her leg, had corrective surgery and later on was fitted with an artificial limb. Little by little, the rest made their way through various operations, until finally, they were ready to go into the world, on their own.

## Chapter 18: Going Home, Going On

During all the years of my imprisonment, whenever I dreamed of freedom, I envisioned a process that would go something like this: the war would end; the gates of the camp would be swung open, and we would be out of this horrible place in a jiffy; I would not even look back as I was leaving. So, now that we were free, why were we remaining here in camp? Why -- because we had no other choice. Chaos prevailed outside of camp, not law and order, and there was no transportation. Buses and trains were not running, and we would have to wait until some order had been restored. Besides, where would we go? Home? We knew fairly well what we could expect once we returned to our home town -- nil, a big fat nil. And yet, the yearning to go home once more was so great, that it remained the only thing to do.

On the second day of our newly found freedom, we received a visitor to the camp, our long time benefactor, the man whom we had nicknamed "Uncle". This man had defied the Germans throughout all the years of our incarceration; he made a career out of helping us in every conceivable way, regardless of the jeopardy into which he placed himself and his family. On this, our first meeting as free people, he brought along with him his wife and daughter, seeking shelter for them from the occupying soldiers, many of whom were perpetrators, committing rape and ravaging the community. We welcomed our dear friend and his family and gloried in this first moment that we could spend together, openly. All through the years, we had to hide and secretly exchange a word or two with him. He, our "Uncle", never passed any of us without using the opportunity to hand us something. By purposely bumping into us or brushing up against us, he made quick contact with us; and thus, without anyone noticing, he was able to hand us something -- a piece of bread, a potato, or a token of fruit. However valuable his little tokens were to us, his act of compassion was much more important, carrying with it the message that we were not alone, that someone cared about us. Now, at last, we were all able to talk together and touch each other openly, without fear. His kind face beamed with happiness, and we were extremely grateful and happy to be with him and his family.

Although some girls had ventured out of the camp many times since we had been freed, it was not until the third day that our little group decided to walk to the nearby city. Since we did not posses any identification papers, not even papers classifying us as concentration camp inmates, leaving the confines of the camp created the dangerous possibility that we could be mistakenly identified as being German citizens. When the first troops of the occupational forces moved in, there was chaos everywhere, with no law and order anywhere. The soldiers thus became judge and arbiter. The bitter and hateful feelings fostered toward Germans, tended to make

these soldiers take the law into their own hands and act harshly, especially when dealing with German women. Thus, we tried to travel in groups, to rely on each other for help, and that way be able to lend credibilty to our identity. Besides, having been incarcerated and persecuted for so many years, we were not yet able to travel by ourselves. Fear had been a part of our daily existence for so long, that it would take some time to rid ourselves of this pestilence. As we traveled, walking along, we often turned around, looking for anyone who might be following. We were no longer used to walking on sidewalks. Instinctively, we still walked in the middle of the road; for many years, the Germans had incessantly drilled this into us, because in their eyes, we Jews were not good enough to mingle with other people. Even with all these immediate concerns, there was yet a more troubling issue that would haunt us for a long time to come, namely, our perception of reality. To us, reality had become concentration camp life, and death. Normal day to day life had ceased for us years ago. It was no wonder therefore that when we walked by buildings bearing shingles such as, P S Steiger MD, or Beck & Beck, Attorneys at Law, or Mrs Hardy's Dressmaking, that to us, these people and their shingles were a part of the past, and we presumed the people who dealt in these services to be dead. We would remark, "Oh look, there used to live a dressmaker, or a lawyer, or a doctor". It didn't occur to us that these people were here and very much alive. We had lost touch with reality. Instead of enjoying our first venture into freedom, our morale began to sink. And so, to try to build it up again, we sang out, loudly, as we wandered along, in the middle of the street.

Our first journey ended uneventfully, and we returned to camp from our escapade by evening. As we had traveled on this day, we could see that a great deal of plundering and looting had taken place everywhere. We had been unperturbed by these scenes since we were in the process of singing a Hitler youth song which stereotyped Jews as having crooked noses, who should be sent to Siberia where their bones would be broken and thus would never be able to return to the German Fatherland. We frivolously sang the same words, by substituting the word "Germans" for the word "Jews". It felt good to unload some of our frustrations which were so deeply bottled up inside. At one point in this journey, we passed a small truck into which men were loading bundles of leather. The truck was parked opposite a leather store, and these men were in the process of looting the store. We stopped, transfixed, to look; in no time at all, the store was emptied of all its merchandise, and the truck was soon filled, ready to move on. The driver started the ignition, shifted into gear, and the truck jerked forward as it sped away, causing a bundle of leather hides to roll off the top. It fell in front of us, right where we stood. We looked at each other, not knowing what to do, but soon decided to pick up the bundle, reasoning that if we didn't, someone else

would. There were three complete hides of beautiful calves leather in the bundle, and we promised ourselves that we would have shoes made for each of us, from that leather.

After our first outing, returning to camp living made our long isolation from society and the realization of our current predicament even keener. One day shortly thereafter, a girl returned from the train station with the news that a train would be leaving Parschnitz, the city in which our camp existed, in a couple of hours. We grabbed whatever few belongings we had, and together with those eager to get out, we ran to the station. What we found in the station was a train, but a train that wasn't going anywhere soon. Men were working on it; they said that as soon as they could make the necessary repairs, the train would leave, but when that would happen, was anyone's guess. In our impatience and with the uncertainty of later being able to find a place for oneself on the train, we rushed aboard and all took seats anyway; we were not about to leave here and go back to camp ever again. This turned out to be a very wise decision because in no time, the train was completely filled. Not only were all the seats occupied, but there were people standing and sitting in the aisles, and even riding on the outside steps of each car. Six to seven hours later, the train was ready to depart. We had no idea of the train's destination, but we were going with it anywhere, as long as it took us away from this place, our former prison. The hour was around 9PM, and it was already dark outside. Suddenly, the train's shrill whistle pierced the night air, and for a brief, startling moment, we shuddered, recalling the whistle that had been blown by the Camp Commander and the SS women. Then, lo and behold, the train finally began to move, and with that movement, in that very same moment, a resounding "Hurray!" could be heard. We stuck our heads out of the window and watched the station receding into the distance.

And so, at last, began our long circuitous journey home. There were many Russian soldiers on board, and they turned out to be our main suppliers of food. The train stopped many times during that night, in the middle of nowhere, either for further repairs or waiting to be cleared to use one of the tracks ahead. Our group huddled close together in an effort to find some comfort and to get some sleep, but under the circumstances, this was almost impossible. Instead, we took short naps, with heads resting on one another's shoulders. To go to the bathroom was also impossible. In order to reach the bathroom, one would have to walk over people sitting or lying in the aisles; furthermore, the line leading to the bathroom door was unending. We were only able to take care of these, our most urgent needs when the train stopped in a field, and then we exited and entered the train through the window.

Dawn found us completely disoriented. We did not know the

places we had passed by, where we were going, or the train's destination. We finally passed a small station bearing an unrecognizable name, and thus we did not have much of a clue as to where we now were. Several kilometers outside the little village containing that station, the train slowly came to a stop. As on previous occasions, some people jumped off the train to inquire as to why the train had stopped. As information was exchanged back and forth among these people, it became apparent that our train was not going to continue on its route. Most people then got off the train and congregated beside it, on the ground. In no time, about a dozen small bonfires appeared alongside the tracks, made from the twigs and wood gathered from nearby fields. On these bonfires, people cooked their morning meals, which included "ersatz" coffee, that is, coffee made out of grain, since real coffee was almost nonexistent. Some brewed tea; some, cooked soup. Even the Russian soldiers had a fire going, and it was to these Russian soldiers that we now turned for our breakfast; we felt that they were the most likely to be able to spare some extra food. We had not a cent among us with which to buy food, even if there was any food to be bought in the vicinity. And because of the Russian soldiers, that morning, the breakfast was good; it consisted of hard black bread, hard yellow cheese, raw onions, and hot black tea which we drank Russian style, chewing a cube of sugar while sipping the hot tea directly from a soot stained pot. With breakfast finished, the Russians went to inquire as to when the train would again be moving, and we went along with them to act as interpreters. The train's engineer informed us that for the time being, our train was going to remain where it was until further repairs could be made; however, were we to walk several kilometers from here to another junction, a train would be passing there, going in the direction of Prague. Having no other choice, and no desire to waste any more time, we, as well as a lot of other people, immediately took off for that junction. We were all glad to get moving, and in an hour and a half, cutting across many fields, we reached the place. With no train in sight, we sat down alongside the tracks and waited. After a short rest, we began to walk, following the tracks, until we reached a small town with its own train station. No sooner did we arrive at the station, than the whistle of an approaching train could be heard; we had very fortunately arrived just in time. The train pulled into the station and slowly came to a stop. One or two people stepped off the train, but many more people were waiting to board. The train was however filled to capacity; there wasn't even standing room available. The Russian soldiers began to shout and even to curse in Russian, but to no avail. One soldier hoisted himself up to look inside a window and then said that there was still some space available between people. With the help of the soldiers, we climbed into the train, through the window. Inside, we squeezed and pushed to find standing room. The soldiers themselves made it onto the train

through the entrance door. For them, people squashed together even more, to make space available. And so, the train pulled out of the station; we were now on our way to Prague. We had a long ride ahead of us, and we were already tired from the previous night's journey. Crushed together, as if in a vice, we swayed in unison each time the train rocked. After a while, the crowd of people shifted around, and somehow, a small amount of space opened up around us; we were even able to sit down on the floor.

The train made several stops before reaching Prague, and a few people got off, but others got on again in their place. We were lucky that the compartment windows were partially open; otherwise, the smell of human bodies pressed together as if in a sardine can, would have been sufficient to make one faint. Toward evening, we arrived in Prague. Getting off the train, we walked through the station and out into the street. Everything looked gray and it had begun to rain. At first we did not know what to do nor where to go, and so we approached a policeman to whom we explained our situation. He directed us to the Jewish Community Center which had its temporary headquarters in a hotel. When we arrived at the Center, we were warmly greeted. We were given a hot meal, and for the first time in many years, we were given a room to share, a private room, which we had all to ourselves. After bathing, we had the distinct pleasure of retiring to sleep on real honest to goodness beds with mattresses, and although we shared these beds with each other, it still felt like heaven on earth. In no time at all, we were soundly asleep.

On the next morning, we were again graciously fed. We then spent a few hours wandering around Prague, inquiring about possible train connections. The Czech people we encountered were extremely warm and hospitable, and we will always have fond memories of them.

Toward evening, it was still showering as we departed for the train station; there we boarded a train going into Poland. We had a long ride ahead of us, and luckily we found enough vacant seats on the train, for which we were very grateful. As the train left Prague, we suddenly realized that we were on the last leg of our journey home.

Soon, darkness descended, and since we were being lulled by the continuous rocking of the train, we were actually able to get some sleep. As we drew closer to the Polish border, however, we could feel the tension in each of us mount. Thoughts were racing through my mind, infinitely faster than the train was traveling, in anticipation of reaching home. Finally, around 4AM, we arrived at the border. We were instructed to disembark and to clear our passports with the Polish authorities. Naturally, we did not posses any passports, nor for that matter, any identity cards. We walked into the small house where the authorities were

located, and explained our lack of identification, by describing to them the place from which this train journey had begun for us, the concentration camp. The authorities did then allow us to cross the border, advising us that we would have to take a different train, which should be here shortly.

Within an hour, the train arrived, and we were on our way again. With every receding kilometer, the train brought us closer to our home town. Our nerves grew steadily more taut, until they seemed to be like the high pitched strings of a musical instrument, and felt as if they might snap at any moment. Icy ripples and chills were moving everywhere over my skin. Pictures flashed before my eyes, of that time, years ago, when, involuntarily, this journey had begun for me, and here it was now, voluntarily, coming to an end. We sat at the edge of our seats with a tightness in our stomachs and prayed in silence. "... please God, let there be someone at home, please, please, ...", and all the while we knew that it would take the miracle of all miracles, to make it true. We stood with our faces glued to the windows, as the train entered our city at approximately eleven o'clock in the morning, and rolled into the station. We disembarked and stood motionless for a few minutes, looking around. Then we proceeded out of the station and again stopped to look. The town was the same, and yet it looked so strange. Tears began to roll down our faces. People around us looked at us out of curiosity, but then went on their way. I wanted to shatter their indifference, their smugness. I wanted to scream out in protest, "You are the ones, you were fools enough to acquiesce and be a party to the murders; together with the Nazis, you wielded the power of life and death! But look, don't you see? We are back! We are alive! We made it!", but only I could hear my silent, raging protest that I managed to stifle and keep inside. Instead, I swallowed hard as we began to walk away from the station, going home. At the street corner, the four of us separated, Rose going to her home, Miriam to hers, and Drezl and I to ours. We made a pact that, regardless of what would happen, we four would find the Jewish Community Center and again meet there later in the day.

Drezl and I left the center of town, walking on familiar streets which we had used so often when going to and from school, or when visiting friends, or when just walking along them because this was where we had lived. We now walk in the shadow of that past toward our future, and from that past, a memory comes. ... I'm walking beside my older brother, Meniek, he, a tall young man, and I, a short little girl. I can't keep up with his long strides and so I decide to put my hand into his coat pocket and into his hand. I'm skipping alongside of him and wriggling my hand inside of his big hand. I am so happy to be near him; I love him so much. ... All this, a lifetime ago. Now, going home, we

pass a small familiar bridge; from here, several more blocks, a few turns, and we quickly find ourselves on the street where we used to live. Time stops, and disorganized mental images sweep across our consciousness. With hearts pounding and faces ashen and white, we walk on. Someone must have recognized us before we reached the house and alerted the others to our arrival. As we approach our house, a group of Polish tenants stand in front, people who for years had lived together with us and whose children grew up with us. They stand in silence as we walk through the gate into the courtyard. I hold my breath; my lips try to move, to speak, but nothing escapes; my thoughts tumble in all directions at once. My mind is on the house as I last knew it, and the years begin to telescope with scores of thoughts of things past. We cannot hold back our tears and have a hard time controlling our trembling. Leaving the courtyard, we proceed up the flight of stone stairs; at the door, we stop for a moment. Chimes ding-dong softly when I press the bell, and the door opens almost immediately; the caretaker's wife appears. In that one chilling moment, hope shrivels up and dies. With dry mouth and quickening pulse, I stand there, unable to utter anything; those words just will not come. "Hi. We have come home. Is any of our family here?", Drezl is finally able to say. With that, we reenter our home, our parents' home, our brothers' and sisters' home, our home. Not having any choice, the woman steps aside to let us in. I walk through the door, as if in a trance. This is my birth home, the home I grew up in; I yearned for and dreamed of returning to this place one day. Now strangers live in it. We walk through the foyer, glance into the kitchen, and then back through the foyer to the dining room. Everything is so strange and looks so different from the way it used to be. Pictures flash before my eyes, memories of the way everything here used to look. I remember the sound of her voice -- "Mamma, Mamma, what became of you? What agony and torture did you go through? How did your final moment come - by bullet or with poison fumes? Where is your resting place; where can I cry my tears? Did you die together, Dad and you?". The pain spreads, raw and deep. Suddenly, an uncontrollable anger grips me. I turn to the caretaker's wife and say, "As you can see, we are home now. You will have to vacate the apartment for us." She folds her arms and replies, "My husband and I are not moving out of here. If you want an apartment in which to live, you can move into our old basement apartment, which is now standing vacant since we moved up here". "But this apartment house belongs to our parents; this is our apartment". "Nothing is yours", she screams, "You Jews, they should have finished you off, as well". For a moment, our throats constricted, but then Drezl managed to say, "The police will make you get out of here". The caretaker's wife just laughed in our faces. But the cold truth was that we already knew that we would never again be able to spend even one more night in this haunted place. There were too many memories here. My insides hurt

to the point that I could no longer stand it. I began to feel so weary, that I felt like fainting. Drezl looked at me, and realizing my urgency said, "Come, let's go". We stepped out into the hall and walked down the interior flight of stairs.

On the first floor, a tenant lady, around whom we had grown up, greeted us with tears in her eyes. "I thought for sure you were all dead", she said, wiping her eyes. She asked us into her apartment, and we gratefully entered. Time stopped again; everything looked the way it did before I was taken away. We sat down, and Pani Kubicka offered us a cold drink. This elderly, heavy set woman was wearing an ankle length, fully gathered skirt and on top of that, a heavily starched and immaculately ironed apron. She came up to me, and with a twinkle in her eye and a smile on her face, asked me if I wanted a pickle, whereupon, I burst out in tears. I put my face on her shoulder and cried spasmodically. Poor soul, she didn't know that her offer of a pickle had reawakened so many memories from the time when I was a little girl. Every fall, Pani Kubicka used to put up a big wooden barrel of sour pickles to cure; this was to last them through the winter and into the next season. The barrel always stood in one corner of her immaculately clean kitchen. Pan Kubicki, the woman's husband, was a coal miner who had a special liking for homemade pickles, and as a small child, I too had a craving for them. Every so often, this wonderful woman used to call me into her kitchen and hand me a pickle, with which I was so visibly delighted.

After crying for a brief moment, I was able to compose myself, and I again sat down on the kitchen stool. We started to talk of the years that had passed during our absence. Pani Kubicka told us that she had sent someone to bring Krysia, her adopted and married daughter, here, when she had heard that we were coming. For reasons that were unknown to us, Krysia had spent some time as an inmate in the infamous concentration camp, Auschwitz.

To be sure, inmates of the concentration camp, Auschwitz, came from many different national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds; however, the majority of these people were Jews and Gypsies. The remaining minority were not dealt with nearly as harshly or as inhumanely by the Nazis. Furthermore, people in this minority were usually in charge of something, holding some position in the camp. Most of the time, this elevated their status, putting them into a superior position, which gave them better access to food and clothing. They were also much less likely to suffer any corporal punishment at the hands of the Nazis, and were not in immediate danger of being killed. Krysia, being a non-Jewish Polish national, was among this elite group of people while she was in Auschwitz.

In a short while, Krysia arrived, appearing visibly moved by

the news of our survival. We talked for a few minutes about her life in Auschwitz and about the atrocities that she had witnessed there, perpetrated by the Nazis. ... And she told us this story. ... In 1943, the Germans were doing away with the last remaining Jewish population of the Ghettos, sending trainloads of Jews to Auschwitz to be annihilated; the crematoriums were operating at maximum capacity. It was a matter of extreme luck for anyone who was part of these transports to survive. On one occasion, Krysia was standing, imprisoned behind a barbed wire fence, watching as a train arrived at Auschwitz. The people were let out of these cattle cars, and suddenly she recognized our mother among the people in that crowd. Waving her arms and gesturing, Krysia tried to attract her attention. At some point, she thought that mother had recognized her, so with other hand motions, she tried to make our mother understand that the next thing that would happen to her would be that her head would be shaven, and that she need not be afraid. Soon, however, that entire group of people including our mother was led away. Later, Krysia used some connections that she had developed to inquire into the whereabouts of this group, explaining that she was interested in one particular woman, our mother. She was told that the entire transport had been led directly into the gas chamber. No one had survived; she never again saw a member of our family. ... Krysia was now crying. She bore her scars visibly, to be seen in her eyes. As she lifted her eyes now, and caught mine, I could see not only her weariness and her wariness, but also the pain and apprehension that was their cause, things that she had learned to live with.

This then was the news that we had come home to hear, that we did not want, that we needed to know, though we had already sensed it on first ascending the stairs to our apartment. We sat, unable to move; the pain cut deeply into our inner being; the tears ran freely down our faces. Finally, getting up off the stools, we thanked them and left, walking out into the courtyard. Looking around, we could see the faces of onlookers from behind window panes. We walked around the corner of the courtyard to the garage, in front of which lay the broken canoe that had once belonged to Meniek. Next to the garage stood the workshop, and as we opened its door, a rooster flapped its wings, cackled, and scurried across the shop, disturbed by our entrance. It turned out that several tenants were keeping chickens in there to provide them with eggs. The chickens had been roosting on the old work benches that we knew so well, and they were covered in chicken droppings. All the tools were gone. The garage was empty except for a few broken car and motorcycle parts, parts that my brother used to work with. Drezl looked at me and I at her. Pain stricken, we made the decision to leave. The memories were too heart rending, and there was nothing to hold us here. Once more we walked through the courtyard and looked up into

the row of windows, behind which we were born and raised, where once the voices of our happy and bustling family resounded. I looked toward the balcony, with its French doors that lead into the living room. The hanging flower boxes were still there, but they were empty. Where once there had been the flowers that my mother took such pride in planting, now there was nothing. The flowers were dead, she was dead, father was dead, everyone was dead. Poland was a place of ghosts, and with its desolation and destruction, it had swallowed up my family, along with millions of others. All that remained of my family were both the vivid memories of the people, and those deeply branded images of their murder.

Hunched over, embittered, lost in our grief, we walked toward the center of town which had once held a thriving Jewish community. On the way, we met a girl from our camp who told us where the Jewish Community Center was now located.

The Center had again set up its quarters in what was formerly a predominantly Jewish area. Since the "Judenrein", the cleansing of an area of its Jews, this city was now devoid of Jews. Except for the few Jews who had been hidden by Christians, or those who had joined the partisans, so too was the entire country devoid of Jews. Now, these few survivors were coming home, seeking out other survivors. Likewise, those who had survived in Russia were beginning to return home. All were being bitterly disappointed. Not only didn't they find their families, but they found their homes occupied by Polish people. A preponderance of returnees were murdered as a result of the strong anti-Semitic feeling still fostered by the Poles. Often a killing assured the safe keeping of Jewish belongings which had been acquired at the expense of Jewish lives, when this bounty had now been threatened by the reappearance of a ghost, a survivor. A son of a former neighbor of ours, the sole survivor of a large and prominent family, was found with his throat slit, one day after his return home. He was only one of many who died at Polish hands, after surviving the war years.

Arriving at the Jewish Community Center, we were asked to register so that our names could be added to the growing list of survivors. In this way, returning family members could search the list and begin to look for each other. Just then, Rose appeared, and from her pale and drawn face, we could see and she confirmed her sad news. We awaited Miriam's return, and in the meantime again met several girls from our camp who had also just arrived and who were also in the same predicament that we were in. We all decided to find a lodging place together. A man in charge of placement gave us a key to an apartment that we could all share. He also told us that we could come for free meals here at the Center, until we could finally provide for ourselves.

We waited for several more hours until Miriam finally did arrive. She was visibly shaken and couldn't control her pain. She burst out in a loud, uncontrollable spasm of lamentation. We took her into our midst, and slowly she quieted down.

Altogether, we were now seven girls, and so we went in search of our apartment. We arrived at the building and climbed the stairs to the attic, which consisted of a kitchen combined with another single room; this was our apartment. Though we were content to have a roof over our heads, the lack of furniture posed a problem; the entire extent of the furnishings in our new household was a table and several chairs in the kitchen and a cot standing in the adjacent room. That night, except for Drezl who was voted to sleep on the cot, the rest of us bedded down on the floor, using the blankets which we had brought along from the concentration camp.

On the following morning, we went to the Jewish Community Center for our breakfast. Arriving, we found other refugees from concentration camps already in line in front of the food counter. Standing there, people began to simultaneously gather information about each other, and pass that information back and forth, inquiring of a person their name, where they had come from, what concentration camp they had been in. For each of us, the most important question of course was, had they met one of our family members during their camp ordeal.

Not knowing for certain where the members of our family had been taken, nor what had happened to them, our immediate task became to find some news that could shed some light on these unknowns. There were no offices yet that could help us, and the remnants who had survived were scattered all over. The only way then to get information, was by word of mouth, with one person passing as much information as possible to the next. In this way, I chanced upon a man, who knew another man, who was presumably with my younger brother, Motek, in concentration camp.

With great anticipation and mounting excitement, I now went to find that person, praying to God that my brother still be alive. I arrived at a shabby looking apartment where a group of former concentration camp inmates now resided and asked for the man who knew Motek. A young fellow stepped forward and said, "Yes, I was in a camp with your brother". "Where is he? Surely, he's alive?" "I don't know if he's alive or dead. When the forced march began, he was sick and remained in camp, in the infirmary. He had become as swollen as a balloon one day, and we didn't know the cause. We were quite friendly, he and I, and I was sorry that he had to stay behind." "What do you presume happened to him?", I asked; "Surely he must be alive somewhere." Even

as these thoughts reeled through my mind, I knew how futile my pleading was. With visible sorrow, he replied, "I don't think he's still alive. German policy and practice was to do away with people who became ill. They probably shot all the sick people after they had sent us off on the forced march." This was the most bitter pill to swallow. My hopes were shattered; my prayers were gone. My grief was great. One by one, my suspicions of total disaster for my family were becoming reality. I returned to our apartment to share this dreadful news with Drezl.

In our day to day lives, since we had no income, the lack of money posed a real problem for us. We could not buy anything for our sustenance and therefore could not satisfy our daily needs. The only item of value which we possessed was the bundle of leather hides, and so we decided to turn them into currency. A lively black market could be found on every street corner; we therefore reasoned that the best possible price for the leather could be gotten there. Two of our girls volunteered to do the job, and as they were about to leave with the hides, we again reminded them that this was our only possession which we could convert into cash. A couple of hours later, they returned carrying a bundle of money. We started to count; there were thousands of Polish Zloties. We were overjoyed; we thought that we were now rich and could afford anything. We'd had a veritable treasure in our possession, and didn't even know it.

Naturally, it was now time to go shopping, and what else was there to buy, but food. Several of our group were dispatched; they soon returned with meat, potatoes, cabbage, and other fruits and vegetables, all of which we had not had throughout all the years of our confinement. In our kitchen, there were several pots and a frying pan; these utensils now became very handy since we finally had some food to cook. This then became our first home cooked meal, consisting of a pot roast, cabbage soup, potatoes, carrots, and of course, freshly baked bread. For dessert, each of us had a delicious apple, and a heavenly meal it was. Very soon, however, we realized that our treasure was not nearly as large as we thought it was. Every time we went shopping, a substantial chunk of our money was spent. The monetary value that we were accustomed to from before the war, was now quite different. Before the war began, Grosze and a single Zloty could buy a kilogram of meat and potatoes. Now, those same items could cost hundreds of Zlotys. It was no wonder, therefore, that after about one week, most of our "treasure" was used up on food alone.

With every passing day, new returnees registered at the Jewish Community Center, and so each day we visited the Center looking for any new information about missing members of our family. The remainder of the time, we seemed to wander aimlessly. The Polish people, who appeared to hate

us, considered us to be persona non grata. The Russians did not care about us; we were not their responsibility. Lurking around every corner were memories of death and destruction; with each step that we took, we could see the skeletons of our past. We were leading a futile existence, to be sure, with no promise of a better tomorrow in sight.

One day, as I was in the process of searching for survivors, I was mingling with a group of returnees from Russia. When I mentioned my name to one of the men, he said that he had known my brother, Meniek. He also said that he had heard someone else say that Meniek was alive and living somewhere in Warsaw. My hopes soared high enough to send me in pursuit of my brother. I ran back to the apartment to tell Drezl this remarkable news, and said to her, "You stay here, I'm going to Warsaw to bring back Meniek." My nerves were so highly strung with anticipation and expectation, that I could not wait a single moment longer. I had to go and find him immediately. I had no need to pack anything since other than the few shabby pieces of clothing that I now wore, the only other thing that I possessed was the coat that I had sadly inherited from the girl killed in Auschwitz. I quickly walked to the station and boarded a train. Soon the conductor made his rounds, calling, "tickets please", and made a notch on each passenger's ticket. When he finally asked for my ticket, I grew very embarrassed and nervous, confessing to him that I didn't have any money and explaining the reason why. He looked at me with an expression of some doubt, but he did allow me to remain on the train. Arriving in Warsaw, I found the city in ruin, with heaps of rubble everywhere. After many inquiries and much wandering, I finally found the Jewish Community Center, but I had arrived there at the end of the day. Luckily, someone offered me lodging for the night which I gratefully accepted; there I shared a room with eight other survivors. The next day, I talked with officials in charge, looked through lists of returnees from Russia, walked around inquiring from anyone and everyone, but I could find no sign of Meniek. I soon realized that my trip to Warsaw was futile; there was no one here with my brother's name or bearing his description. On hearing that a train was leaving that evening, I decided to catch it so that I could return to my home town of Sosnowiec, as soon as possible. By now, the sun had dropped below the horizon, and the slopes of the hills were darkening below their gilded rims. As luck would have it, this train was not traveling the regular route and would take most of the night before arriving in Sosnowiec. Worse still, the train did not have a scheduled stop in Sosnowiec. Unfortunately, I only found these things out after I had boarded the train, and it had already left the station. With the way I now felt, nothing really bothered me very much anymore. The thing that was so clear to me was that he, Meniek, wasn't here. I was suddenly assailed with a feeling of vertigo. I wound the window down and raised my face to the draft of air; my skin

was ashen and I felt oblivious to the curiosity reflected in the faces of the people in the car. They now seemed too remote and distant. I spent the long night sitting between two other travelers, with the reflection of my feelings mirrored by the expression on my face. From time to time, however, my fellow travelers engaged me in conversation. They were curious to know where I was coming from, and where I was now going. The small talk continued into the morning hours, when the train began to approach Sosnowiec. I now had to decide whether to stay on the train until the next stop, which was quite far out of my way, or whether to jump off the train as it was passing the city. Since we had been liberated, all of us had developed a more "devil may care" attitude, and though I was frightened, I nevertheless decided to jump off the moving train. As the train rolled through the station without stopping, it slowed down a little. I positioned myself on the outside steps. As the station rushed by, a meadow appeared; I took heart and jumped. The train's momentum caused me to hit the ground hard, and I felt a momentary wave of pain in my ankle, which I had badly sprained in the process of jumping. After a while, I picked myself up and with much effort, limped back to the apartment. And again, I had to share the bad news of our family, concerning the absense of Meniek, with Drezl.

Let me describe for you now, our fate as returnees -- the lot facing all of us Polish born survivors. As it now stood, North and South American countries had a quota system that only admitted immigrants through a painfully slow process. Had the gates of Palestine been open to admit the wretched remnants of European Jewry, no one would have hesitated to go and leave behind them this European continent stained with the blood of their brethren. However, the road to Palestine was closed; immigration was illegal. During the war, the Zionist organization with its headquarters in Palestine called "B'riha", which means "Flight" in Hebrew, helped Jews escape from Nazi occupied Europe. They worked under cover, smuggling people across many borders, and if they were successful, they eventually gained entry, albeit illegally, into Palestine. Though the war was now over, the B'riha still faced the very same predicament; they still had to contend with closed borders and illegal entry into Palestine. And so they proceeded very much in the same vein as they had before, during the war, thus making it a very tedious and dangerous undertaking. Each and every Jewish life was so very precious, especially now that there were so few Jews left in Europe, with each one of us having already endured "Gehenna", Hell, here on Earth. It would be sinful and a real tragedy to lose any more lives now, and yet it happened; every so often, casualties occurred at a border crossing.

One incident in particular caused our group to change its

mind about immigration to Palestine and to not go with the B'riha; this was entirely because of the risks involved and not because we didn't trust them. It was our bad fortune to have discovered such a tragedy; it happened to a family as they were crossing a border, a family whose acquaintance we had made on their return from Russia.

This family which consisted of a mother, a father, and three children, had undergone years of travail deep in Russia, and were among the few lucky families to emerge from the war alive and all together. Now, they wanted to go to Palestine; they had had enough of Russia, Poland, and other so-called host countries. They wanted to go home to the land of their forefathers, and the B'riha was going to take them there. The procedure that the B'riha followed was to gather together a group of people in a rented house which they used as a transit station, a jumping off point. Then, at the appointed time for the border crossing, after bribing the guards and under the cover of darkness, they transported people across the border in trucks.

German "selections" that had taken place in concentration camps such as Auschwitz, were notorious for tearing families apart. With this as our history, no Jewish family would ever again allow itself to be forcefully separated. As the time of their passage neared, one of the Russian returnees' children came down with a bout of high fever. Since their transit was already arranged, the parents were persuaded to go on ahead with their son, while their older daughter remained behind to take care of her ailing sister. The two daughters were to make the crossing with the next group. When the time came to part, they vowed to each other that they would never again be separated. Before the loaded truck left on its journey, the captain promised to send back word as soon as the crossing was completed. News of the tragedy didn't arrive until the next morning. The guards had collected their bribe but had not kept up their end of the arrangement. As the truck approached the border to cross into Germany, floodlights illuminated the truck and the surrounding area. The truck sped away and a barrage of shots rang out. On the truck, ten or eleven people died, and among them was the Russian couple. Their son was slightly wounded. This then became the new source of horror for us; to live through and survive the hardships of war, and then to die, just as the promise of redemption is so near.

With nothing to hold us here in Sosnowiec any longer, we came to a very painful decision. We decided to return to Germany, the place where we had spent the war years as prisoners and had longed so much to escape from, the place which we had just come from on our return to our homes in Poland. We no longer had any homes. We had heard rumors that the Allies, especially the Americans, had created displaced persons camps for former concentration camp

inmates in Germany.

With our dream of a reunited family shattered, and the cruel reality having become evident in this, the town of our birth, we set out once more on our way. This time, however, the matter was much more complicated. To reenter Poland, the country of our birth, was easy; to leave Poland and cross the border into Germany, was not. We had no right to cross borders at our whim, and more so, we had no official papers to make it possible. And so, following the example of many other Jews who were trying to get out of Poland, we came up with a gimmick which we hoped we could rely upon to gain entry. We pretended that we were Greek nationals who were returning to their homeland.

Again, we packed our few belongings and set out on our way. By then, the fortune that we thought we had acquired on selling the leather hides, was entirely used up. In order for us to remain on the train without having a ticket, we had to resort to trickery. When the conductor asked to see a ticket, we pretended not to understand him. Between us, we used some mumbo jumbo, pretending to speak Greek. If it were not for the underlying tragic cause of these events, this could have really been taken as a rather cheap comedy; we were truly characters. We were successful in getting on the train in our adopted role as Greeks, and we were now traveling toward Germany. At the border, we had to get off the train and once again use trickery, this time to make the Polish border patrol believe that we were returning to Greece. We must have been quite convincing because we had no trouble crossing the Polish side of the border, and then we were successful in dodging the patrol on the German side. Once completely across the border, we became giddy and silly, and began to laugh and jump around as if we were small children, who had just put one over on somebody. We had a rather long wait until a train arrived, and we boarded it, without again knowing its exact destination. As we traveled deeper into Germany, other displaced persons boarded the train at various points. We asked them about the displaced persons (DP) camps, and we were given the names of a few of them. These DP camps were named after the towns in which they were located. We decided to go to camp Feldafing, in Bavaria, not far from Munich. The train brought us to Munich, where we changed to another train going to Feldafing.

On our way to the DP camp, we were among many other travelers who were in the same predicament. Most spoke a broken German, some with and some without a foreign accent. Not knowing the true nationality or background of one another, it was always a matter of guessing who was Jewish and who was not. Unexpectedly, we heard an expression that put all our quandaries to rest. With the train filled to capacity, we suddenly heard one seated man call out "Amcha", and then a few people answered with the same word "Amcha".

You see, in Hebrew, "Amcha" means "Your People". The word "Amcha" became the most popular word of identification for us, the Jewish survivors, wherever we went.

In Feldafing, we departed the train together with a lot of other people from the camp. The buildings, the barracks, of which the camp was composed, were once the lodging and quarters of the German "Vermacht" and other branches of the German army. On our arrival, we registered and were given a place to share in a room with other people. It was camp life all over again. This room, however, was large, with bunks beds along two of the walls. In the middle of the room, there was a big table with its own benches, and on one side of the room, there were several chairs. Drezl, Miriam, Rose, and I would be sharing this room with only six other people. And though it was camp life all over again, this time we were free.

This DP camp was under the supervision of the Joint Distribution Organization, and former concentration camp inmates were managing its internal affairs. Feldafing had an elected board, officers, and even an internal police force. Those survivors with a skilled trade, had set up individual shops and were engaged in offering their services. Others who were unskilled, were given an opportunity to learn a trade of their own choosing. Food was plentiful, and we were given some money with which we could buy clothes. Life was far from normal, but at least we were given a chance to make a go of it.

Camp life in Feldafing was full of activities. On a daily basis, you could expect to find games of soccer, theatrical performances, concerts, and even weddings. However, there were also many tragic events that occurred. Quite often, one of the two people in a couple who had just taken their marriage vows, suddenly received news that his or her previous spouse was alive, after all. Decisions of what to do at that point, were always heart rending.

It was in Feldafing that Drezl met a man whom she eventually married. Their newly found happiness was even moreso enhanced with the birth of their son, shortly thereafter.

I, in turn, decided to pursue a nursing career. My studies as well as my work at the hospital and in the skin dispensary were taking up my time during the weekdays. On weekends, I would usually visit the friends I had made in the DP camp, who now lived in the town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, which was located on the same train track as Feldafing. At a distance of approximately 60 miles, Garmisch-Partenkirchen lay in the German Alps, and was situated next to the highest mountain in those Alps, called the Zugspitze. One side of the Zugspitze was adjacent to Garmisch-Partenkirchen and the other side belonged to Austria. This town is world famous for having

sponsored the Olympic games; alpine chalets displaying colorful paintings of mountain life, adorn the town. The Bavarian men are dressed in "Leder Hossen" and the Bavarian women wear "Dirndels", peasant dresses. Two sisters, camp friends of mine, discovered that their brother had survived and was now living in that town, in an apartment which had once belonged to a Nazi, and which the Americans had assigned to survivors. Other survivors who came to the town, were also lodged in the same way. The Americans saw to it that a place was assigned to the survivors to hold religious services; they also designated a meeting hall to be used as a pub, and once a week, they provided a band. It was on one of my visits to my friends, that we decided to go to the meeting hall. As we entered, the band was playing and people were dancing. We sat down at a table, and a waiter came over, offering mugs of beer. We sat looking around and soon, a couple of men approached our table. A tall, slim, very handsome man stood before me, asking if I would dance with him. I stood up and walked with him to the dance floor. He turned out to be a poor dancer. After the music stopped, he walked me back to the table and asked if he could sit down with us. David is his name, and in the course of our conversation, we discovered that prior to the outbreak of the war, David, his parents, and his two sisters had also resided in my home town of Sosnowiec, though we had not known each other there. He too was in search of survivors from this family. We went to the dance floor several more times as the German "umpapa" played on. We talked and talked. When my friends and I remarked that it was time to leave, Dave asked if he could escort me home. I said yes, and both of us departed. We walked for a long time that night, and talked of many subjects. It must have been past midnight when he brought me to the door where my friends lived. He knew that the next day I would be taking the train back to the DP camp. He asked if we could travel together, since he too was planning to go to Feldafing. We said good night and parted. That night, I could NOT fall asleep. A feeling of such magnitude as one I had never before experienced, was in my chest. Next day, I met Dave at the train station and traveled with him to Feldafing. He escorted me to where I lived in the camp, and asked me for a rendezvouz at 8 o'clock that evening. He called for me at the appointed time, and we went for a long, long walk which reached to the outskirts of the camp. My heart was pounding. I was 21 years old, and I realized that I was in love. He took me into his arms, kissing me, and I returned his kisses. I suddenly found the wonder of life, and I was very happy. We fell in love with each other and decided to get married. Rose, my inmate companion, had already married, and her husband was fortunate enough to have survived, together with his two brothers. All three brothers came from a very religious background and were well versed in Hebrew and the religious tradition. The oldest brother, therefore, agreed to be the person who would marry us. Dave was very friendly with an elderly lady survivor

who occupied a large room in one of the "Block" buildings at Feldafing DP camp. He and another survivor were lodging with her whenever they found themselves having to spend the night in Feldafing. Both men had nicknamed her "Ciotka" which means "Aunt" in Polish. Ciotka arranged for our wedding take place in her room; she also prepared the food and took care of all else that needed doing. Dave had been living in an apartment in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and after our wedding, we planned to live there together.

Now, I needed a dress! I searched among the german women and finally bought a used blue tulle dress which fitted me well. Dave had invitations printed which we gave out to our friends. Two of the invited guests were the doctor and the orderly, both German people with whom I worked.

We were married on June the 24th of 1947. Our "Ketuba", our marriage certificate, was hand written on an ordinary piece of paper by the brother performing the ceremony. It is still in my cherished possession today.

B3053, this is the number that is tattooed on Dave's left forearm; only by this number was he known to his former task masters. That he was able to live through the numerous camps in which he was imprisoned, is indeed a great miracle. Dave was brutalized in many of those camps, enduring tremendous physical and psychological pain. He was very reluctant to speak of his experience, though to me, he would sometimes, haltingly recall the events .... these events ....

With the coming of the war, Dave and his family followed the common trend of moving inland, and thus they returned to the town of their birth, Dzialoszyce, in close proximity to the remainder of their family. For a short period of time, Jews felt relatively safe in this small town, since the occupying German forces didn't unleash the fury of their murderous tactics immediately. But within a short period of time, this bestial enemy extended its many tentacles of destruction, attempting to accomplish its devilish task. First, they carted off individuals to labor camps. In 1940, it was Dave's destiny to be sent to such a labor camp in Krakow, where he was kept, working until 1942. One day, when he and a large group of inmates were being marched to an "entlausung", a place the Germans used for delousing, he stole away and was successful in returning to his home and family in Dzialoszyce.

He barely had any time to enjoy being together with his family, in the warmth of his home, before the Germans surrounded the little town with a detachment of SS. They herded all the town's Jews into the market place in the center of town. From there, they were put aboard a cattle

car train and driven to the neighboring city of Miechow, where, in an open space within a meadow near the railroad tracks, the Germans made their "selections". Dave saw his parents and sisters being put on a transport, the destiny of which he would later discover was Treblinka, one of the infamous death camps, where the murderous elite of the Third Reich snuffed out the lives of their innocent victims. Dave, very luckily, was "selected" to go to the labor camp located in Krakow-Plaszow, where he worked for a time. One day, while in Plaszow, he and several other inmates were walking along the barbed wire fence, waiting for Poles to appear on the other side with food to sell. The inmates bought this food with the money they were still able to conceal. Just at the time when Dave reached through the wire fence to exchange money for bread, a German guard who had noticed this exchange came running, and with the outstretched butt of his rifle, swung it with full force several times, hitting Dave on his face and head. Blood spurted profusely from his nose, from one eye, and from several other wounds on his head. He swooned, crumpling to the ground. The other inmates who were with him, used this diversion to their advantage and ran away. After what seemed like several hours spent in an unconscious and then in a semiconscious state, Dave became aware of two inmates who then came and dragged him back into the barracks. He realized that he was now going to be in for a rough time because of his injuries; he couldn't see out of his injured eye, his nose was broken, and he had a bad gash on his skull. Fortunately, one of his fellow inmates cleaned him up and took care of him until he was able to take care of himself again. His injuries were so severe and painful, that for a long time, he could hardly talk or chew his food. Once the swelling subsided, his vision did return, though it was blurred for quite some time.

In time, all the surviving inmates of the Plaszow camp were gathered together and transferred to yet another concentration camp, Krakow-Jerozolimska. Here, Dave was put to work as a locksmith. Though mistreatment and beatings were a daily occurrence, one incident stands out foremost in his mind. On this particular work night, the commander of the camp paid a surprise visit to the locksmith shop. Everyone jumped to attention for commander Goet, who was very inebriated; it quickly became obvious that he had come there to stir up trouble, something he did fairly frequently. Goet inquired of the shop's foreman as to how many inmates were in his employ. Caught by surprise and off guard, not knowing with certainty this exact number, the foreman quickly snapped back the answer of "thirty three", hoping that he was right. Goet then shouted, "Line up and count off!". The inmates quickly assembled into three lines and started counting "One! Two! Three! ...". Dave was the seventh man in line, but when his turn came, instead of snapping "Seven", he anxiously shouted "Six-ah-seven!". Now, the number "six" was being used by the inmates as a

code word, signaling to them that a German was approaching. Somehow, Goet had gotten wind of this code; on hearing Dave's count nervously begin with a repetition of that number, "Six", in his drunkenness, Goet became infuriated. "Six you said", Goet muttered, as he pulled out his revolver, aimed it at Dave's head, and pulled the trigger ... but nothing happened. Again he squeezed the trigger, and yet again, but the gun still refused to discharge its bullet. Goet swore loudly and then replaced the gun in his holster. The men continued their count. When the count finished with "Thirty", the foreman had the presence of mind to continue with, "My helper makes thirty-one, I am thirty-two, and thirty-three is the man whom I sent to fetch additional supplies." The two additional men accounted for by this quick thinking foreman were nonexistent, invented to bring the count correctly to "Thirty-three". At this moment, the door of the locksmith shop was flung open, and a German SS entered with an inmate at his side. "Herr Kommandant!", he snapped, "I caught this Jew near the barbed wire fence, where he tried to escape." The inmate insisted that he was merely returning from the latrine, but Goet would not listen to his excuse. He quickly pulled out the same revolver as before, in his drunkenness forgetting its previous performance, shouted "You damned Jew", and aimed at the inmate. This time the gun went off, and the man fell to the ground, dead.

In 1943, a contingent of men including Dave was transferred to the concentration camp Kielce. Here, his work consisted of scouring fuel barrels clean. Those barrels with leaks and those in need of repair, were washed prior to being soldered, to prevent them from catching on fire. Then around July of 1944, Dave was again part of a group being transferred, but this time to the infamous concentration camp of Auschwitz. In this hell's kitchen, he worked in the "Buna Werke" until January of 1945. By then, the Russian army had begun to advance, and the remaining male inmates, the laborers, were evacuated from Auschwitz by way of a forced march in the middle of the winter, so as to prevent their liberation by the Russians and hasten their destruction.

The winter of 1945 was harsh and extreme, and produced a great amount of snow. The prisoners marching, were sparingly dressed, in their shabby striped uniforms and wooden shoes. Emaciated from hunger and the long walk, "Muselmans", walking skeletons, were falling by the wayside and were being shot to death by the guards. As the Russian advance gained momentum, the surviving men were loaded into open railroad box cars and were driven the rest of the way to Mathausen concentration camp, in Austria. However, because of the already overcrowded conditions at Mathausen, they were refused entrance. Meanwhile, the men remained exposed to the brutal winter conditions. Snow blanketed them, and because of the total lack of food and water, they

subsided on snow alone. Every day, there were more and more dead to be disposed of; as instructed by the Germans, they were merely thrown out of the box cars.

From Mathausen, they were driven to concentration camp Oraniensburg, near Berlin. Several weeks later, they were transferred to concentration camp Flossenburg, then to concentration camp Leonburg, and finally to concentration camp Muhldorf.

After a short stay at Muhldorf, they were once again loaded into open box cars, and were soon to discover that this train was to carry them to their extermination. At this point, their morale was so low that most inmates no longer cared about their fate. Remarkably, the train never did reach its intended destination; instead, it traveled haphazardly from place to place, until it came to a final stop in Bavaria, near a town called Tuzing, on April 30th. Here, they were liberated by the American army. Most of the men that had survived, were near death. So close had the Germans come, that given only a short time more, and no one would have survived this forced evacuation. Dave was certainly only days away from his own death; he had a high fever, and like many of the others, was no longer able to walk. They were transferred to a makeshift hospital in Feldafing. He was diagnosed as having among other things, typhoid and spotted fever. The high fever made him delirious. He suffered from blackouts and memory loss. It took him a long time to recuperate. His pain and nightmares persist to this day, as they also do for all those who remained alive.

With the exception of a few individual cases, the preponderance of Holocaust survivors were anxious to leave Germany. The countries which had once been occupied by the Third Reich, including Germany itself, were saturated with the blood of our families. Why then, would we want to prolong our stay here. Every moment, every word of the German language reminded us of the horrific tragedy, and made us re-experience the pain of the cruelty and of the inhumanity that was irrefutably perpetrated against the Jewish people. Survivors lined up at all possible foreign embassies to register for visas and for eventual entry into those countries. All embassies had immigration quotas, and allowed only a certain number of individuals entry from European countries. As a result, almost all of the Jewish eastern European survivors renounced their former citizenship and chose to accept the status of "stateless person". As stateless individuals, Dave and I registered for immigration at both the US and the Canadian embassies. Now it became a matter of waiting until a visa was granted to us. I personally wanted very much to settle in the newly established Jewish state of Israel. But because of Dave's tragic wartime experiences which he barely survived, he did not feel that he could handle the difficult struggle of settling in this strife ridden region, a region which would soon experience yet another war. Dave needed tranquility to heal his raw and abused nervous system. In addition, Israel was a new and poor country; everything was in short supply. My sister, Drezl, and her family, who had emigrated to Israel, struggled terribly there, and we were able to help them, by continuously supplying them with aid packages. And so, we decided not to emigrate to Israel.

Now, we waited impatiently from day to day for news of our visa. In 1948, a son was born to us, a golden haired, blue eyed miracle. What unspeakable happiness for us. Dave took to his bicycle and made the rounds of his friends with the announcement. On the 8th day of his life, our son was circumcised and given Dave's father's Hebrew name of "Nachum". While we lived in Germany, we called him Nuni, and later in the US, he took on the name of Norman. Time passed and still no visa; no matter how many times we inquired at the embassies, the answer was the same, no visa yet. Many of our friends had received their visas and were leaving for the countries of their destination. The Jewish population in Garmisch-Partenkirchen was growing increasingly smaller. Dave and I were becoming extremely worried and were very discouraged. Dave and a friend opened a confectionery stand in Munich to supplement our income, which was a meager pension from the Bavarian Reparation Bureau. The years of 1949, 1950, and 1951 went by with no news. In 1952, another son was born to us, "Shlomo", Solomon. This time my father got his namesake. During this pregnancy, I often questioned if I could love my soon to be second child with the all encompassing love which I had bestowed on my first child. My query was answered the

minute Solomon came into the world, and my arms were once again filled with happiness. We now had two loves that made our lives bright. The children kept me busy. You have to understand that there were none of the modern conveniences such as disposable diapers, ready made formulas, or baby food in jars. Every bit of food was personally prepared, four to five times, each and every day. Diapers were boiled, washed, hung out to dry, and even pressed. I soon came to the realization that it would be smart for me to learn English, so that when we would receive a visa, someone in our family would be able to speak the language. Dave had become acquainted with an elderly German couple by the name of Thiebes. Before World War II, Mr Thiebes had held some kind of an ambassadorial position in England. He was a highly educated individual, a gentleman of some 80 years, and spoke a perfect Oxfordian English. He professed to never having belonged to the Nazi party; but then again, if you were to inquire of any German, you would discover that no one had been a Nazi, no one knew what had taken place in concentration camps, even when a camp, such as Dachau, was located in close proximity to their homes, in their own town. Mr Thiebes was eager to earn extra money, and so he became my teacher. He visited my home twice weekly. He drilled English grammar into me. He taught me the use of the language in the manner to which he was accustomed, and he was a perfectionist. More time passed and very few Jewish families remained in Garmisch-Partenkirchen; still no visa from either the US or Canada.

By 1954, Norman was six years old and ready to enter first grade. Since religion was a compulsory subject in Germany, we were faced with a problematic situation. The only way to address it was to have our son spend the school period of religion on the playground, which he did. One day, Norman returned from the school, teary eyed, asking me "Mutti, wass ist ein verfluchter Jude?", Mommy, what is a damned Jew? This is what the kids were now calling him. We had never had any illusions about the anti-Semitic feelings of Germans toward us. But to hear it again so soon, after what we had gone through, was devastating. We wondered if we would ever receive a visa and be able to leave here. This was now 1955; only 2 Jewish families were left in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, our friends the Wassersteins and ourselves. Soon, the Wassersteins moved to Munich, though they continued to keep their apartment in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, and we were now the only Jews left.

The long awaited moment came in March. Hard to believe, but we were offered visas to the US and Canada at the same time. We chose the US -- finally, we were leaving. We packed our belongings, including the Torah which had been given to us by the Joint Distribution Organization. We took a night train to Le'Havre and embarked on the ocean liner, the SS America. Garmisch-Partenkirchen was again free of Jews. We had a wonderful crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, and arrived

in New York on May the 5th of 1955. It was a very hot but wonderful day, and a new beginning for us. Dave had one surviving cousin who was taken in by the Swedish government after the war. In Malme, he married another survivor, and together they had already immigrated to the US and had taken up residence in New York City, by the time we arrived. Once we had been processed by the immigration authority, we visited with Dave's cousin for a time, until we were ordered to go to Washington, DC. Upon our arrival in DC, we checked into a cheap motel, where it was stiflingly hot. We remained there until we found a 2 bedroom apartment on Kennedy Street NW, in the capital. Now that we were situated in our own apartment, I scrounged around for used furniture, and so we set up our new household. We went to the Jewish community for help, and Dave was referred to a Jewish businessman who dealt in ironworks; his name was Gichner and his business was the "Gichner Ironworks". Mr Gichner himself dealt directly with Dave because he spoke German, and Dave did not know a word of English. Mr Gichner had hired Dave to distribute parts and tools from the warehouse to his employees. Subsequently, Dave enrolled in evening classes at the Americanization school. Dave was a quick learner, and he soon graduated with honors. Once he was able to understand and to converse in this new language, he took a job at the Giant food store. Thereafter, L T Rogers, a new department store, advertised its grand opening and its need for employees. Dave secured a job as order and delivery manager. In the Fall, Norman started second grade at the Hebrew Academy in Washington. Sam, as he was now called, attended nursery school. Both children were learning the language very quickly. I took a refresher English course, and just in case that I might need it, I learned to type. I reconnected with a few of my friends from camp, and even met my Uncle Morris (whose painting had intrigued me in our home in Poland) and his family, who lived surprisingly close to where we now lived.

Though we were momentarily established, our future was still uncertain. Dave did not know in what field to pursue his career, and we did not know in which community we wanted to put down roots. Everything was so new for us. One day, a man named Sol visited us. He was referred to us by one of my friends. Sol was an insurance agent, and he explained to Dave that he needed to have insurance to protect his family. Sol was also a survivor. After selling us a policy, he convinced Dave to join his company, Sun Life of Canada, in Baltimore, and to become an insurance agent. Dave attended an insurance course, and became an insurance agent. Then he enrolled in a college, learning more about the insurance business. Eventually, he also attended the Johns Hopkins University. Once he started working in the business, we moved to Baltimore, MD, where we purchased a semi-detached, three bedroom home. Our children transferred to the Talmudical Academy of Baltimore. Dave mastered his new language beautifully and grew to be an integral part of the

office in which he worked. Over the years, he became one of the two most successful insurance agents in that firm (the other one being his friend, Sol), a testament indeed to his perseverence and determination. He made a meaningful contribution to all those people in his community whom he served, and achieved a great success for himself and his family, starting from absolutely nothing. In time, we moved to a bigger, more comfortable home in the northwest section of town where there was a large Jewish community. For their high school years, Norman attended and finished the Baltimore City College and Sam, Northwest High, both very challenging and respected academic high schools. They both went on to college. Norman finished his senior year at George Washington University with a perfect score and received a BA in Mathematical Statistics; he then continued on to do post graduate work at College Park MD in the field of computer science. He has been employed by the US Census Bureau, Bechtel Engineering, and UC Berkeley. Sam finished Carnegie Melon University with excellent grades, and then attended Howard Medical School. He completed the 4 year curriculum in 3 years, graduating Magna Cum Laude, with an A average, at the top of his class. He specialized in ophthalmology in Los Angeles, and now has his own practice in San Francisco. I augmented my own education, by attending Hebrew College in Baltimore, and by taking various courses at the University of Baltimore. Today, besides being both a mother and a grandmother, among other things, I am an active inventor, the holder of a number of interesting patents.

All through our years here in America, Dave and I took a very active part in the civic life of our community, as evidenced by these often publicized events pictured here.

# Epilogue

The uppermost thought in peoples' minds, and the question most frequently asked about the Holocaust is: "How can I and the rest of the Jewish people believe in God, after what has been done to us?".

This question, without a doubt, is a valid one, and basically no one has a completely satisfactory answer, not even today's theologians. No cause, however just it may seem, can be allowed to inflict such cruelty, pain, and inhumaneness, as the Jewish people were singled out to endure.

Nevertheless, the question persists, and like a hot branding iron that is applied to flesh, leaves the scorched letters of the words, Why! Why!, which scream out, demanding an answer.

According to our Bible, God is merciful, full of compassion and loving kindness. He is omnipotent and forgiving. The multitude of people who believe in God, pray to Him and find solace. What then, is the answer? If we examine the question more closely, an answer becomes possible. "How can the Jewish people believe in God after what has been done to them?" -- Done to them by whom? By the Nazis, of course, and their helpers, the anti-Semites. In other words, it was done by people and not by God.

God gave us this earth and created people in His own image. He gave us a mind with which to evolve and with which to work toward our betterment, to grow and to love one another without the need for further divine interference. Like a father who has faith in his children's integrity and ability, He gave us the tools we need to live.

What did man do? He used this mind of his to invent matters of his own -- like hatred, wars, killing, persecution, and a holocaust. We can't blame God for our shortcomings. The blame lies squarely in the lap of men. If anything, God is disillusioned and full of disdain. Perhaps, He waits for us to start behaving more like His children. Surely, in His ledger, nothing is ever forgotten, though many people wish to forget many things.

Our memory has to act like a book of judgment, concerning those who have taken it upon themselves to decide who is to be or not to be, a judgment reserved only for the highest court -- the Almighty, Himself.

This account is my legacy to the generations to follow, especially to my children. It is an inheritance, not of money, but rather of something infinitely more precious and important: "To Be", that is, to be alive.

The End

With hope, man is akin to God Himself, without it, he is a mere mortal.

Ida Gelbart

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